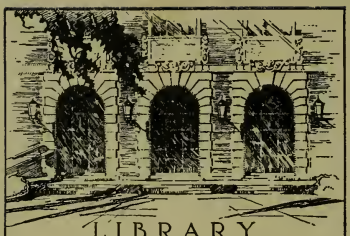
Our Connaught Cousins



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MY CONNAUGHT COUSINS.

BY

HARRIETT JAY,

AUTHOR OF "THE QUEEN OF CONNAUGHT," "TWO MEN AND A MAID," ETC. ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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MY CONNAUGHT COUSINS.

CHAPTER I.

"MUSHA, but this is a bad way we're in, yer honor," said Shawn, as he wiped the rain from his blinded eyes, and tried in vain to penetrate the darkness which lay like a cloud around us.

I shivered as he spoke, and silently acknowledged the truth of his words.

We were in a bad way indeed.

For several hours that evening we had lain damp and chilly on the banks of a

lonely lake, waiting for the wild geese; having secured several victims, we gathered up our belongings, and prepared for a walk over several miles of dreary bogland towards home. But we had scarcely covered a mile of the ground, and were in the most desolate part of the mountain, when the darkness, which for some time had been gradually coming on, fell like a pall around us; a bitter wind swept lightly over the moor, and rain began to fall. Still we wandered on; at length Shawn paused, declared, with a tone of shame in his voice, that he had lost his way, and asked what was to be done.

What *could* be done?

We were surrounded by black darkness, fully seven miles from home. We had lost our way, and had no means of regaining it. It seemed to me that the only feasible plan was to remain where we were till dawn.

We had just come to this despairing decision, and were about to make the

most of our boggy bed, when there was borne to us out of the darkness, on the breath of the wind, the faint echo of a human voice. Never before had a voice sounded to me so pleasant. Darting forward, I was about to hail the stranger, when the more prudent Shawn held me back.

"Don't spake, yer honor," said he; "'tis that thief o' the world Mick Maloney, and if he hears *your* voice he'll surely take us for the peelers."

So we kept perfectly still, while the unconscious stranger approached.

As he drew near we heard that he was singing softly; next we distinguished the words of the song.

"Send it gaily round,
Life would be no pleasure,
If we had not found
This enchanting treasure.
And, when tyrant death's
Arrow shall transfix ye,
Let your latest breaths
Be whisky, whisky, whisky."

"Wid all the pleasure in the world," said Shawn, bringing the song to an end, the singer to a standstill. "And now, Mick Maloney," he continued, "thank the good God above that we're not the peelers, but only two poor cratures that's lost our way."

"What, Shawn!" came in stentorian tones from the darkness.

"Yes, in troth, it's Shawn, and the young mashter along wid him, and both just as wet as can be. We're seekin' a night's lodging, Mick Maloney, for we can't get home, and the bog's but a wet bed at the best o' times, and no way fit for the likes o' us."

Who Mick Maloney might be I had not at that time the most remote idea. I only felt that he came like an angel of goodness that night, for, after a short whispered conversation with Shawn, he agreed to lead us to a haven of rest. So we gathered up our traps again, with a much

lighter heart than we had laid them down, and followed the footsteps of our guide.

How far we really went, I never could discover, but at the time the distance seemed to me interminable. The night was so dark that I could not see one foot before me, and I stepped recklessly on, tumbling in and out of bogholes, while the wind blew clammily on my cheek, and the rain fell, soaking my garments through. At length our guide paused, and I saw that we stood before the closed door of a mud cabin. The hut looked black and desolate as the scene surrounding it, and I thought at first that it was quite deserted, but on Mick Maloney applying his knuckles to the door, and giving three peculiar taps a faint whistle came through the keyhole; then, with the words, "all right," spoken in Irish, the door flew open, I was hurriedly hustled in, and it closed again.

The transfer from black darkness to bright light was so sudden that for a

moment my eyes were blinded, and I could see nothing, but I heard around me a hissing of steam and a splashing of water, which told me where I was.

Our guide had led us to a still-house.

Yes: when at length I removed my hand from my blinded eyes, I saw that my supposition was correct. There, a yard or two from my very feet, stood two illicit stills in the height of distillation; some half-dozen stalwart fellows were working them, while a couple of young girls, an old woman, and a man were filling stone jars with potheen. The sight of this labour was anything but pleasant to me. I knew that if, by any stroke of ill luck, the police should happen to pass by that house that night, come in when the work was proceeding, and find me coolly looking on, I should be summoned before the magistrate, and ordered to pay a heavy fine. Yet what was I to do? Stay in the warmth and

shelter, or return to the cold, wet, desolate bog? I decided to adopt the former plan, so having thrown off my dripping overcoat, and taken a good drink of the whisky which was so liberally bestowed upon me, I lit my cigar, and taking a seat beside the fire, looked leisurely at what was going on. Shawn threw down a little straw for the dogs, put my gun in a place of safety, hung up the birds, and then went over to the boys to give them a hand with their work.

Fully an hour passed thus:—both the stills were empty, and the last jar was being corked, when we were suddenly startled by a peculiar scraping and whining at the door. Shawn flew to open it; as he did so, a dog crept in.

"Patrick," cried one of the girls, addressing the drenched animal, "is it the peelers, dear?"

The poor brute set up a yell as if in answer, and seizing one of the stills with

his teeth, tried hard to pull it along the floor.

"It's the peelers sure enough," said Shawn, and I felt an electric thrill run through me.

Immediately the scene became one of wild confusion, and I found myself in the midst of the *melée*, but before I had time to think in what way I could be of service, the whole of the work was done. The stills were lifted bodily from the ground and taken out of the house, and the stone jars quickly followed. In less than five minutes all was cleared away, the dripping dog which had caused all the commotion was in the corner making overtures of friendship to my surly retrievers; two of the boys were examining my birds, the girls were washing the potatoes for supper, and the rest of the company were seated around the fire listening attentively to Shawn's account of our adventures that night.

Presently a loud knock came to the door.

"Who's there?" cried Mick Maloney.

"Open the door," came from without; "make haste, ye spalpeen, ye. If ye dare to remove one of the stills I see at work—"

The door flew open, and the strangers rushed in. Four men dressed in plain clothes, but looking as little like Irish peasants, whom they were intended to represent, as men could well do.

"Good night, sergeant," said Mick Maloney quietly, "if you've come all the way from the barrack to-night to see a shtill at work, I'm sorry for you!"

The sergeant made no answer, but he looked keenly around.

The room in which he stood was the only one which the hut contained. A large kitchen, with a mud floor, black bare rafters and loose stone walls, through the wide crevices of which the wind crept. Over a great turf fire, which burnt on the floor, the pot of potatoes swung, supported by

a black iron chain which was fixed in the rafters, while around the fire, sitting cross-legged on the floor, was the family. They moved closer together and made room for the unwelcome intruders. The three policemen sidled up to the fire and unbuttoned their coats, revealing as thy did so the revolvers which were fastened in their belts, and the swords which hung from their sides. The sergeant, who had drawn his revolver, still stood aloof.

"Now, Mick Maloney," he said, "you've been lying to me and deceiving me for several years, and I don't mean to believe you any more. Don't I know, without your telling me, that you make enough potheen here every year to supply the whole of Connaught? Yes, and I know, as well as you do, that you were making it here to-night."

"Were we in troth?" said the young fellow innocently; "then why didn't you find us wid the shtills?"

"That's exactly what I can't make out," confessed the puzzled sergeant. "When I got the information that you were at work to-night, I thought I'd nail ye, for the night's so dark ye can't see a hand before ye, and if I had caught ye,' he continued, putting the revolver into his belt again, "I'd have clapped every mother's son of ye into gaol, and made ye suffer for the runs you've given to me!"

The boys laughed; the sergeant, judging from the confident faces of one and all that no stills were within reach that night, stood for five minutes warming himself by the fire, then with his men he departed.

All that night I remained in the hut, but when the first gleam of dawn appeared I prepared to go. The fate of the stills was a mystery to me; I questioned Mick Maloney, and after a little hesitation he pointed to a strip of brown bog which

lay to the right of the dwelling, and replied.

"There they are, yer honor!"

"Where?"

"Sunk in the bog there, and the whisky along wid them."

"There?—why the police might walk over that spot at any moment and discover all!"

"So they might, indeed, but then they don't, and we've hid them there these six years. And if they did find them they couldn't punish us, for sure they're not in any house, and the Lord knows who put them there!"

He walked over the bog, drew up one of the stone jars, and presented it to me, and as I shook hands all round and wished the family "good-bye," they all expressed a regret that with last night's work the distilling for that season was over—but hoped, plase God, I might come next year, and see a good drop made!"

But with that year's work the Maloneys ceased their labour of illicit distilling. A few months after my midnight adventure, the faithful animal which had been their sole protector from the police, was found poisoned on the hills. Whether or not the police had at length discovered the use to which the dog was put, and so determined to destroy it, no one could tell; at all events the Maloneys deemed it a fitting time to give up their dangerous work;—after they had committed the body of their favourite to the earth, they sold the stills and never again made a drop of potheen!

CHAPTER II.

"NOW, yer honor, jist lie quiet and aisy; keep the gun on full-cock and all ready, but never shtir a limb till I give the curlew's cry, and then look out, for the birds will be jist within shot of ye."

So spoke Shawn, as he laid the last bunch of heather on my quivering body, and having satisfied himself that I was perfectly well concealed from human sight, he prepared to creep off to the spot where he had seen the wild geese alight, in order to drive the unconscious victims directly over my head. I nodded as he gave his instructions, and ere he crept away, promised implicitly to obey

his commands. But I felt anything but comfortable in my novel position. My bed was the bare bog-land, oozy and soft with the soaking of the heavy winter rains; my covering the half-withered heather which Shawn had uprooted from the hillside. The prospect all around me was black and desolate as the sky which loomed above, but the bitter wind came creeping over the hill, and froze my face and hands. I lay patiently for some time, the sportsman-like ardour in my heart preventing the wind from utterly freezing my limbs, but at length my patience got exhausted, and I began to stir. Suddenly I heard the faint whistle of the curlew, — a minute after I saw a flock of wild geese pass almost directly over my head. I fired wildly, and missed!

Then I found that my garments were completely soaked with bog-water, and that my limbs had sunk several inches deep in the oozy ground; nay, more,

that they were only prevented from sinking farther by some obstruction which was so hard and cold that it made my bones ache. My first care was to exhume my half-buried limbs, my next to unearth the substance which had prevented me from sinking utterly. This latter proved to be no easy matter, but with the help of the spade which Shawn had brought with him to prepare my boggy bed, I at length succeeded in clearing away a good deal of earth and discovering that my life-preserver was a deal box, some five feet long, stained almost black with bog-water, and fastened down with half-a-dozen rusty nails.

I had heard, during my childhood days, of fortunate people being enriched by the discovery of buried treasures, but, I need hardly add, all such romantic ideas had long since vanished from my mind; and yet, as I gazed at that peculiar-looking box, I felt as if a cold spell had

passed over me, and a succession of the wildest thoughts surged through my brain. Exhume and open it I must, and the wish became stronger within me when Shawn, who soon returned from his goose-driving, did his best to dissuade me from such a proceeding.

"Sure, 'tis no affair of ours, yer honor," said Shawn, looking at the same time so profoundly uncomfortable as to cause my curiosity to increase. "Maybe its a little potheen that the boys have buried—"

But I cut him short, and insisted that he should help to exhume and open the box. Seeing I was determined, he at length set to work, but he was so slow, and evidently so unwilling, that at length my patience got exhausted. I took the spade from his hand, inserted it in the crevice upon which Shawn had been working, and with one powerful wrench forced the lid. We both recoiled in horror—the box contained a corpse! After the first

shock of the discovery was over, I looked again, and my dismay increased tenfold.

"Why, Shawn," I exclaimed, "if it isn't—"

"Yes, in troth!" broke in Shawn, "sure enough, it is,"—and we both stared into the box again.

In order to explain the strange circumstance which enabled me to recognise this corpse, I must chronicle events which took place several weeks before I exhumed it.

On the fifteenth day of November, the annual fair was held at Gulranny. The anticipation of this day usually created a good deal of excitement in the minds of the peasants in and around Storport—for it was always constituted a sort of gala time; but the announcement of the fair of 18— brought with it whisperings of woe to many a home. The crops had been bad that year, and the miserable half-starved tenants had been unable to scrape

together enough money to pay the rent, so the procter had summoned them to attend the sessions of Gulranny, in order that they might show cause why they should not deliver up the whole of their worldly goods. On the eventful day, which was ushered in with hurricanes of blinding sleet, I ordered Shawn to bring out the horse and car, that we might drive into Gulranny together. By the time we started the hail had ceased to fall, but still the wind blew bitterly, freezing with its icy breath the little pools on the wayside, and when we drove into Gulranny I felt almost as if my blood was frozen. It was midday by that time, and, save for one or two decrepit old men whom we had passed on the road, we were the last to arrive. What a gathering there was! The streets of the little town were so crowded that it was almost impossible to make one's way along. In the market-place bevies of rosy-cheeked

servant girls stood waiting to be hired, pigs grunted and squealed as the drovers whipped them along, the shopkeepers stood at their doors shrieking to the passengers to buy; Mr O'Neil's agent sat in a cosy parlour of the inn, comfortably enjoying his glass of wine, gazing with a smile into the wild, woebegone faces of the creatures whom he had summoned thither, and determinedly shaking his head at every heart-broken appeal.

"Don't come to me," he said; "I'm done with ye, a lot of lazy spendthrifts as ye are. Ye'll go before them to-day as 'll *make* ye pay."

I sat in a remote corner of the room and quietly watched the wretched creatures who crowded around the man, their wild eyes, their famished faces, their trembling bodies clad in the dirty rags which were their sole protection from cold, and as I glanced from them to the frozen window-panes and the sleet which

fell, covering with a thin crystal sheet the kerbstones of the street, my heart turned sick.

"Poor, miserable, half-starved wretches!" I thought, "most of you will have sore hearts to-night, for you will lose your little all; God help you! for there will be nothing but starvation left."

Heartsick at the sight of so much sorrow, which I was utterly powerless to relieve, I arose and was about to leave the room when my eye was suddenly arrested by a figure, ragged, wild, and woebegone, which stood close up by the window. Five minutes before, I had seen this man crouch like a stricken beast before the agent, his skeletonian hands outstretched, his parched lips suing for mercy.

"For the love of God, Toney Monaghan, niver be hard on a poor boy," he had said; "all my potatoes had the black disease this year, and they rotted in the ground. My pig took the sickness, and

died. I have two little children down wid a fever, and if you take away my cow I'll have no drop of milk to give them, and they'll die."

This appeal, heart-breaking as it was, had met with the usual repulse.

"Don't bring yer lies to me. You'll go before them as 'll make ye pay!"

As the man crept back into the shadow, I noticed that the piteous look of appeal had left his face; his features were strangely convulsed, his wild eyes gleamed, and his hand clenched and unclenched in nervous dread.

"That man means mischief," I said as I passed out into the street.

At two o'clock the tenants' cases were to be called on; and as the hands of the clock approached that hour I made my way through the crowded streets in the direction of the court. I noticed, to my wonder, that the streets through which I passed were almost deserted; presently a

succession of moans and cries struck upon my ear, then I saw that people were running excitedly, and, following the direction which they took, I at length found myself on the outskirts of a great crowd which was collected in the principal street before the open door of the court. Seeing Shawn amongst the throng, I questioned him as to the cause of the excitement, for I noticed that many of the people were wringing their hands, others moaned feebly, while others glared around them with wild eyes and then seemed to utter sighs of relief. Instead of replying to my question, Shawn took me by the shoulders, and gently propelled me into the middle of the throng. There I saw the cause of the disturbance. Lying on the kerbstone, his head supported in the arms of a policeman, his face exposed to the wondering gaze of hundreds of eyes, was the agent, stone dead. His body was surrounded by policemen, warders of the

court—nay, at the cry of murder, the very judge upon the bench had stopped the course of justice, and come forth.

"Good God!" I exclaimed, recoiling upon Shawn; "how did this happen?"

"He was jist walkin' along the street, yer honor," said Shawn quietly, "when he fell, and laid his head down and died."

"Murdered?"

"Oh, God forbid! yer honor; what for should he be murdered at all, at all?"

Nevertheless, I felt convinced that my supposition was right; nay more, I believed that I could point out the very man who had done this deed.

. . . . . .

That a murder had actually been committed could not be proved on the spot, but the manner of the man's death was so peculiar as to call for a coroner's inquiry, and a post-mortem examination. The body, therefore, was at once removed

to the inn, and several hours after its removal the two principal doctors of the town were on their way armed with the implements necessary for their work. On their arrival at the inn, a novel scene awaited them. The people, having at length solved the meaning of the awful words, "post-mortem examination," had risen up in arms, and declared that no such desecration of the dead should be allowed. Before Toney Monnaghan became a land-agent, he had been one of themselves, and though he had been a little hard upon them of late, there wasn't a man among them but would raise his voice against having the poor boy's body cut up "like a beast's." The consequence was—a riot. The police were overpowered, the doctors sent packing, the inn taken by storm. For two nights the body lay in state, being waked by its wild comrades. At the end of that time, the authorities, only too eager to bring matters to a peaceful

issue, allowed it to be quietly buried. As the grave closed above it, popular excitement seemed to die away.

But if the people were satisfied, the authorities were not. Everybody believed that a murder had been committed, and that the subsequent riot was only an effort to prevent the discovery of the murderer. No sooner, therefore, was the unfortunate man buried, than the doctors received an order authorising them to exhume the body and make their examination in secret. One night, two nights after the funeral, they set out on their mission with hopeful hearts. Making straight for the graveyard, they employed themselves in opening up the grave. For several hours they worked with pickaxe and spade; at last they came upon the coffin, raised it up, and opened the lid—

It was empty!

At this piece of audacity on the part of some persons unknown, everybody was

more amazed than ever, and again came the conviction, stronger than before, that murder had been done. But try as they would, they could discover nothing. The whole country was thrown into a tumult, and popular excitement was at its height, when I unwittingly solved the terrible secret by finding the body in the bog.

. . . . . .

Having sworn Shawn to secrecy, I assisted him to re-inter the box, and forthwith sent word of the discovery to the magistrate. The box was at once removed, the post-mortem examination concluded, and the discovery made that the unfortunate man had died of heart disease. Again everybody was amazed, and this time the wonder was mixed with shame. After the examination was made, the coroner's inquiry was hurried over, and once more, in solemn pomp, and with all the rites of the church, the agent was laid in his grave. Amidst the solemn concourse which

attended this second funeral, I noticed the wild wan face which had haunted me ever since that day when I had seen it by the frozen window of the inn—the face of the very man whom in my own mind I had accused of murder! For a moment I hung back ashamed; then I boldly walked forward and pressed a bank-note into the wretched creature's hand. He looked from it to me in dazed amazement, then the sight of one of his ragged children seemed to make him realise what the money would do. He clutched it closer, and with one last look down the open grave, crept away towards his home.

By whose hand the corpse was conveyed from the churchyard to the bog was never discovered. It was generally believed, however, that news of the intended examination had been whispered abroad, and that the agent was exhumed and hidden solely with a view to preventing his body being "cut up."

CHAPTER III.

TIME passes quickly in Connaught, or at least so it seemed to me; for never had I known summer months roll so rapidly away. Yet they were gone, and what was worse, the autumn months had gone to join them, and I, still lingering on in Storport, saw that winter was slowly but most surely coming on.

As the seasons changed, the aspect of the village changed too. The mighty Atlantic, which during the lazy summer days had lain like a tawny lion, calm, majestic, gazing with gentle eyes upon the earth, now bestirred itself, lifted up

its mighty voice, and roared as if in answer to the roaring of the wind. Days of tempest came, during which time I found myself pretty frequently in Oona's study, and always by her side when we sat round the fire at night, and told stories, or listened to the wailing of the wind. Sometimes when the wind was loudest and we felt the Lodge swaying in its violent grasp, I drew a bit nearer to my cousin and took her hand, and she did not draw it away. Nay, once or twice I fancied that the slender fingers closed over mine, then becoming suddenly conscious of what she had done Oona would blush and laugh, and tell us some story of folk lore which had been told to her by one or other of the village cauliaghs when she was quite a little child.

It was during one of these evenings, when the wind was shrieking round the house and hailstones were rattling on the pane, that Oona, gazing round upon her

sisters, reminded them of their suggestion that each one should provide me with entertainment for a day.

"He has only had three days as yet," said Oona; "Nora's, Biddy's, and mine."

"And mine," interrupted Aileen. "I didn't tell him a story, but then neither did Biddy, but I certainly entertained him for a day, for I took him over to Glenamoy, gave him some of the best flies I ever tied in my life, and put him in the way of catching three salmon. I think that ought to be counted!"

"So it ought, Alley, and so it shall," I said; "I never enjoyed a day more in my life."

"Very well," said Oona, "if Jack is satisfied *we* ought to be, but that only makes four; there's Kate and Amy still. Kate, what do you mean to do?"

But before Kate could reply, Amy who as usual had been rolling on the hearth with the dogs all round her, scrambled

to her knees, pushed back the dogs, and exclaimed,—

"I know what *I* should like to do. I should like to tell a story! Cousin Jack, if I tell you a story to-night will you call it my day?"

"I will!" I said, and all the girls laughed.

But Amy, grave as a judge, settled herself upon the hearth and told us the story of how Andy Beg became a Fairy.

She told it in very childish fashion, which I have had to alter slightly to suit the requirements of print.

I.

"Did you ever get sight of it yerself, Cuileagh, when you were passing Rhuna Hanish on a Christmas night like this, on your way to the chapel to hear the midnight mass?"

"Get sight of it! Troth, then, I never

did; and 'tis aisy seeing that same, for sure, then, if I had got sight of it, 'tis not here I'd been sitting now, but I'd be lying in my grave as dead as—as—as—" and finding himself unable to discover a simile, the speaker bent over the fire, squeezed some burning ashes into his pipe-bowl, and began puffing vigorously.

He was a short, thick-set man, with little prepossessing in his appearance. His face was, at first sight, hard and most repelling; and this, his neighbours said, was the true index to his character. Cuileagh Clanmorris was a most unpopular man in Storport. Instead of mixing with his fellows and showing his face at fairs and weddings and wakes, he worked like any beast of burden all the year; and on Sundays and feast days, and at Christmas tide, when he had a few hours to spare, instead of enjoying his leisure as a mortal should, he merely stepped into his neighbour Dunloe's, and smoked his pipe in the

ingle, and told weird stories and fairy legends to that child, which, as the population would have it, was no human child, "but only a bit of a fairy itself."

And, in truth, there was something about little Andy, or, as he was called in Irish, Andy Beg, which was extremely fairy-like and weird, a strange, old-fashioned wonder and wisdom which had convinced the peasantry, and some of the child's relatives too, that he was no ordinary being. His mother was the widow Dunloe, who had lived all her life in Storport; and who since that night when Manus Dunloe had lost his life off the Rhuna Hanish, had dwelt in the little cabin on the beach, with only her father and Andy.

Andy was six years old, yet he had none of a child's ways, and no desire for childish companionship. The being for whom he cared most was his grandfather, an old man of ninety years, who habitually sat in the ingle, with his grey head

bowed, and his bony hands clasped upon his knees, in a state of mental torpor, from which it seemed at times an earthquake could not have roused him, but who, at the slightest sound of Andy's voice, stirred and lived, his dull, heavy, lustreless eyes gleaming with a ray of human light. From the very first these two had been drawn together by a strange fascination. Ever since the day when he first began to walk with some steadiness across the floor, Andy had taken his stand between his grandfather's knees, had prattled to him in that strange, old-fashioned way of his; had attended to him assiduously in all his wants, until, as time went on, the child's life seemed to get interwoven, as it were, with that of the old man; and at length, to the wonder of all, it was discovered that he, who during his life had been singularly hard, callous, and cruel, had got all his affections aroused by this quaint little companion of his old age.

He was very old-fashioned, was Andy Beg; he had a pleading, pinched look in his face, and a strange light in his eyes, and a quiet, unchildlike gentleness in his voice, which aroused the darkest fears in his mother's breast. He was not meant for this world, she said, but he was a little fairy, with a human voice, and human eyes, and surely a human soul. He had come to them, and had been a blessing to them, but he was perhaps not destined to stay.

Andy Beg was not a strong child. Once or twice during his short life he had been stricken down, and had lain at death's door; and at those times the old man had awakened from his torpor, and had sat beside the bed, with his dull eyes fixed in agony, as if his life hung upon the child's breath. But Andy had recovered from these attacks, and had taken his place again between his grandfather's knees, his face a little more

pinched and worn, his eyes shining a little more brightly, his voice chiming with a still more pathetic ring. The child's face had never looked so old and strange as it did on that Christmas night, when, standing betweeen his grandfather's knees, with his small white fingers resting upon the bony hands of the old man, and his cheek pressed against his sleeve, he had fixed those luminous eyes of his upon the grim countenance of Cuileagh Clanmorris, and had asked him to tell him of the fairy maidens who tended their flocks on Christmas night on the Isle na Creag —that spot of green which was supposed to be visible every year an hour before midnight mass.

Cuileagh Clanmorris puffed hard at his pipe, and between each puff he gazed more fixedly at the child, and as he did so the hard expression of his face grew tender, and the heavy clouds of smoke more dense. A shade of disappointment

stole over Andy's face as he listened to the grim man's speech, and the little white hand began beating upon the bony fingers of his grandfather.

"Sure I thought you had seen it, Cuileagh!"

"Not I, in troth, but 'tis often I heard tell of it."

For a moment the child stood with his eyes fixed meditatively upon the glowing turf sods; then suddenly he turned round, gently opened the old man's coat, and dived his small hand deep into a pocket in the inside. This pocket was the child's special property; it was solely appropriated to his use; no hands but his ever slipped into it and brought to light the strange medley of things with which it was filled. Andy knew exactly what was there. He could count on his fingers the number of stones he had, which served him as marbles; he knew the exact length of the string which wound his top, and the top, too,

was there—the one which Cuileagh Clanmorris had brought him that time he went to Gulranny fair. They were safe there, Andy knew; no one but himself would dare to rifle the old man's coat-pockets; and the old man himself,—why he was merely a peg on which the coat hung, although, if occasion required, he guarded Andy's property with jealous ferocity.

So on this occasion the child was pretty sure of finding the treasure he sought. His hand dived to the bottom, then it emerged, holding tightly a piece of white loaf-bread.

"Sure, I will give you *this*, if you will tell what you know to me and grandfather." And he held forth the bread as an inducement. Among the peasantry of Storport, white bread was a luxury which was seldom seen, and seldom or never eaten; so, on this occasion, Andy attached to it as much importance as a southern child would do to an apple, a bonbon, or any other delicacy. Cuileagh Clanmorris smiled, drew

his pipe from his mouth, knocked out the ashes upon the hearth-stone, leaned his elbows upon his knees, and looked into Andy's face.

"Ate yer bread, Andy *eroo*, sure I'll tell ye what I know without the likes of that!"

Andy drew back softly with a brighter face, and began munching the bread, and rubbed his cheek against the old man's sleeve, and patted his hand, and added, softly,—

"And you will tell grandfather, too?" while the old man, who had been aroused by the sound of the child's voice, murmured quietly, in a mumbling, half sleepy tone,—

"Ay, ay," and dozed off again.

It was a Christmas night.

Outside on the hills the snow gleamed, and when the voices were still the room was filled with a soft low music floating up from the sea, which washed upon the shingle scarce a hundred yards from the cabin-door. Here and there on the hills

dark figures flitted along, leaving deep tracks behind them in the snow as they passed on towards the chapel to hear Father John say midnight mass. The wind which blew softly scattered the snow and ruffled the surface of the sea.

Andy Beg was fortunate so far as he was spared the misery attendant upon wintry weather and cheerless Christmas nights. A bright firelight played upon him and warmed him, and illumined his pale pinched little face as he stood between his grandfather's knees with his eyes fixed upon Cuileagh, waiting for the tale.

"'Tis often I heard tell of it," said Cuileagh, "but whether 'tis true or not, none but the Holy Virgin herself can tell. They're sayin' it rises up from the say there just before midnight mass. 'Tis a lovely island, they tell, with trees and grass and flowers and streams, and in every one o' them flowers there's a fairy, and in every one o' them streams there's a score

o' them, and under the trees there's a herd o' cattle grazing, and a fairy colleen watching them, and singing the while, and that herd o' cattle," continued Cuileagh, lowering his voice to an awful whisper, "is a herd of mortal men."

"Well, well!" said Andy, fixing his eyes in astonishment; "and how did they come there at all, at all?"

"The Lord knows!" returned Cuileagh solemnly; "but 'tis said they were passing along the say shore on a Christmas night, when they seen the island itself, and the fairies dancing and capering about, and they laughed and clapped their hands, and for this they were made fairies, and on Christmas night they were turned to a herd o' cattle as a punishment, and since then no mortal man has ever looked on it, and if he does, 'tis a sure sign that 'tis dead he'll be before the year is out, and the fairies will take his soul, and tho' 'tis a grand place, sure 'tis only fit for the likes o' them, but not for Christian men."

For a few moments Andy stood silent, looking into the fire; then he turned his little pale face, with the fire's red glow upon it, and gazed into Cuileagh's dark eyes.

"Will I go there, Cuileagh?" he asked; and added softly, "and will grandfather go too?"

"The Lord forbid!" said Cuileagh as he reverently crossed his breast. "Sure you wouldn't wish to go to the fairies, Andy Beg? and as to your grandfather there, why the Blessed Virgin herself will take him when 'tis time!"

"Will she?" said Andy, opening his eyes. "Then maybe she will take me too. Grandfather wouldn't go alone, would you, granny?"

He looked wistfully into the old man's face; he found no gleam of light there, but he saw the grey head shake slowly.

Andy felt ever so little disappointed that night. He would not leave his grandfather, not for worlds, if the old man went to the

Virgin, why of necessity, Andy must go too, but as he lay down to rest, he could not help thinking that he would much rather be going to the Fairy Island, to hear the fairies singing, and to watch the shining sea.

II.

All the world seemed white, the mountains were white, covered deep in snow, and the streams and tarns were frozen to crystal ice; and before all stretched the sea like a glittering glassy mirror sparkling in the light. As Andy stood knee-deep in the snow and looked around him, his eyes got dazzled with so much brightness. He did not know how he got there; he did not know why he had come; he did not know where he was even; he only knew that he stood alone in the snow, away from his grandfather for the first time in his life.

The little fellow folded his arms to keep himself warm, and looked around again.

Behind him the hills stretched in long perspective; then they got mingled up confusedly, and then they turned into old men's faces, and gazed at him through hoary hair. Andy felt a little frightened, and looked at the sea. It still lay placid, and mirrored on its surface were innumerable stars reflected from the heavens above. Not a breath stirred; but as Andy stood looking he suddenly became aware that the air was filled with a soft, low, musical sound, like the humming of a thousand bees. Andy stood gazing and listening enraptured, and then he found that his eyes were not resting upon the water at all, but upon a spot, a lovely green spot, set out yonder in the shining water. He looked again. It was an island, covered with long grass, and tall waving ferns and bright silvern flowers, the scent of which was diffused into the sea breeze and wafted into his face; and he saw figures, bright little fairy figures, moving about amidst these green glades,

and their faces, oh! so quaint and old, just like his own, were turned towards him, and their eyes looked into his.

The whole island was flooded with a bright light, which streamed down upon the grass and the flowers and the little fairy figures which moved about them. Then Andy's eyes wandered on, and he saw a herd of cattle feeding beneath the trees, and he knew this must be the herd of which Cuileagh spoke, for there, quite near them, sat the figure of a lovely colleen singing softly, with her eyes downcast. Then Andy began to think how much he would like to go there, into that cool and lovely place, and even as he thought so the colleen rose, and turned towards him, and beckoned with her white hand. Andy stretched his hands out too, when suddenly he remembered that he was there alone, so he drew back again, and cried,—

"I will come! but I must bring grandfather!"

He turned, and at that moment a great clang struck on his ear, a heavy, sonorous sound, like the ringing of bells, in the air flashes of light darted, and a cry was heard like a human voice. Then Andy felt frightened again, and looked behind him, and he saw the island glittering now like a ball of fire; and the tree tops waved, and the fairies danced; the cattle raised their heads, and lowed softly in weary human voices, and as they did so their heads turned to human heads, and their eyes looked straight into Andy's, while slowly the island split in two and sank softly beneath the water.

Andy opened his eyes, and found he was lying in his bed, with the full cold light of a Christmas morning streaming in his face; the chapel bells were ringing for early mass. He looked around, but he was alone. He never would sleep with his grandfather; the old man looked so hideous and skeletonian in his night gear, his sunken cheeks,

and hollow eyes were made so ghastly by a white nightcap, that, much as Andy loved him, he never could trust himself to gaze upon him in this condition; so, instead of running to his grandfather's bedside, and telling him of his dream, he lay quite still and tried to dream it all over again. But when at length he was up and again standing between his grandfather's knees he looked questioningly into his face.

"Grandfather," he said, "is it to the Fairy Island you would wish to go, or to the Blessed Virgin herself?"

The old man looked at him for a time bewildered, then he said slowly,—

"Sure all good Christians go to the Virgin, and why wouldn't I go intirely?"

"Because," said Andy softly, and his face grew more old-fashioned as he spoke, "because, grandfather, 'tis to the Fairy Island I am going, and I want you to come too!"

III.

From that day, Andy began to change. His face grew more pinched and white, his eyes more luminous, and his manner more old-fashioned and strange. He still stood between his grandfather's knees as he used to do, and attended to the old man's wants, but his voice was sometimes a little peevish now, and he would not speak much to those who were about him. He seemed to become so discontented at times that his mother looked at him, wondering what could be the matter with the child. Andy had always been sickly and white, but he had never been peevish before, he had ever taken what was given to him with a good grace. Now he turned pettishly from his food.

"Mother," he said one day, "why is it that I eat stirabout?"

"Sure, you know we have nothing

else in the house to give you, Andy, *eroo*," his mother replied.

"Sure, then, I know that same," said Andy, "but if 'twas in the Fairy Island I was, they would give me white bread."

His mother crossed herself.

"Never name them, Andy *bawn*. You know you are a Christian child!"

But Andy replied,—

"Maybe I shall be a fairy some day for all that!"

There was something very wrong with the boy, but what that something was none could determine. His mother looked at him again and again with an anxious, scrutinizing gaze, but she could discover nothing. Cuileagh Clanmorris came night after night, and smoked his pipe in the ingle, and looked into Andy's face with those keen penetrating eyes of his, and as he did so his thoughts, almost in spite of himself, travelled back to that Christmas, only a month gone by, when he had told the

child the fairy legend, and when Andy himself had slept and seen fairy-land.

Cuileagh Clanmorris was superstitious, as were most of the peasantry of Storport, and, as he thought over these things, he shuddered. For this hard-working, coarse-natured man had come to love the quaint little old-fashioned child. Night after night now he brought with him lumps of white bread and gave them to Andy, and as the child stood between his grandfather's knees and munched at the bread, Cuileagh tried to tell him other stories to divert his mind. But Andy took no interest in any but one thing, his thoughts constantly reverted to the old theme.

"I wonder," he said, one night as he looked into Cuileagh's face, "I wonder if fairies always eat white bread?"

"Maybe," answered Cuileagh; "they're dainty people, they're sayin', and fond o' swate things."

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"Then, surely," continued the child, "they would give me bread too?"

"If ye were a fairy."

"And grandfather?"

"Ay, ay," murmured the old man, and he nodded his head, and looked at the child with a vacant gaze; while Cuileagh murmured to himself, "Maybe 'tis a fairy that he is afther all."

More and more pathetic grew that little pinched face of Andy's; yet the paler his cheeks became, the more peevish he seemed to grow. There was something very wrong, indeed, for once or twice Andy spoke even to his grandfather in a querulous tone. The old man was dimly conscious of the change, though he was yet too dull to perceive exactly what was amiss. He looked into the child's face with a pained, questioning glance, whereon Andy grew gentle again as ever, and the tears slowly gathered in his eyes.

The winter passed thus, and as each

month rolled away, and the snow was melted from the ground, and the sun shone upon the hills, Andy's face grew whiter and whiter; and when summer came he lay in a little cot by the kitchen fire, close to his grandfather's side. He lay there and thought and thought as he looked into the fire, or listened to the monotonous washing of the sea. His peevishness seemed partly gone now, and he grew quiet, and gentle, and kind as his custom was. Oh, yes, he was quite like his old self, though he looked so pinched and old, and his little white hands were as thin and transparent as his grandfather's.

Lifeless as the old man generally appeared, he now grew dimly conscious of what was happening, and his dull, heavy, lustreless eyes brightened into something like life as he watched Andy's face. He seemed to feel that a chilly hand was drawing the child away, and he began to

half realise what the loss would be to him.

Andy could not understand all this, he was too young. He had been so long with his grandfather that he did not dream of parting; they seemed to breathe together. His grandfather would never leave him, he thought, and as to himself, why, if he became a fairy, grandfather must become a fairy too; and as he lay in his cot day after day, with the summer sunshine streaming full upon him, he thought and wondered over all these things.

"Cuileagh," he said, one day when Cuileagh had strolled in to sit beside him, "are they all little people that live in the Fairy Island."

"Yes, sure," said Cuileagh gruffly.

"Then must everybody get small before they go?"

"Maybe; but what for do ye ask that, Andy *bawn?*"

"Because I was wondering how grandfather will get there. He is so big, you know."

"Sure 'tis not there he will go at all—the Holy Virgin forbid! never spake of it again, Andy *astore*."

And Andy never did speak of it again, but he lay in his cot and grew weaker and weaker, until at last he seemed to fade away, and his spirit broke loose, and went to the Fairy Land.

They laid him out in his Sunday's best, and the neighbours flocked in to look upon the small face and sunken cheeks. Grandfather sat beside the bed, holding in his bony fingers the child's clay-cold hand, and gazing upon him in stupefied despair. As he sat there, only faintly feeling his loss, as yet too senile to understand that Andy had gone from him for ever, he saw the people come and go like waves of a living sea, and as each person came up to gaze upon the pale, pinched, pleading face of the child,

he heard the same words ringing in his ears, "Sure, I always knew he was a fairy, and so he's gone to the fairies at last!"

IV.

The house was very dull when Andy was taken away. Though he had ever been a quiet child, his very presence seemed to bring light and life with it. But now the merest footfall echoed strangely through the room, and the roaring of the sea was ever heard, and the chilly whistling of the wind. For the summer which had taken Andy away had faded away too, and another Christmas was drawing nigh. They had all missed Andy, and they had all said so—but one—his grandfather.

The old man lived still.

He had made no mention of the child. With tearless eyes he had watched them take him away, and then he had resumed his old seat in the ingle. There he sat, day

after day, like a heavy lifeless log; he never opened his eyes to speak; he never raised his head to look around; and he never asked for Andy; but his bony hands were clasped upon his knees, and his knees were always apart, as if Andy stood between them. He never smoked now, because there was no Andy to light his pipe; he seldom took food, because the child was not there to give and share it; he never spoke of Andy, and they thought he had forgotten him entirely. But one day, as he sat there apparently lifeless, he suddenly raised his hand, and put it into the inside pocket of his coat, Andy's pocket, and drew forth the treasures Andy had left—a small piece of white bread, dried now hard as any stone, some pieces of string, and coloured stones and shells. These he held in his hand, and gazed at them with a heavy, stupefied stare, then his fingers closed over them again, and they were put back into Andy's pocket to wait for Andy's coming.

The old man often repeated this, but the treasures were saved from the touch of any other human hand.

Christmas night swept round again, and the peasantry of Storport hurried over the snow-clad hills to hear the midnight mass. In the widow Dunloe's cabin there was no rejoicing; the sea still washed on the shore with that dreary sound which had called Andy away. The widow Dunloe sat silent, thinking of the Christmas night, twelve months before, when Andy had stood between his grandfather's knees, and listened to the fairy tale. Cuileagh Clanmorris was near the fire, smoking hard, but saying no word, and grandfather sat in his usual way with bowed head and closed eyes. The old man was not thinking of Andy, he was now almost too senile to think at all; but he had closed his eyes and fallen into a doze. As he sat thus, something startled him. He opened his eyes, and he saw standing between his knees, invisible to all eyes save

his own, a little bright figure patting his hand, just like Andy used to do. As the old man looked the figure turned, and a little face was raised up to his. It was Andy's face, grown whiter. The old man looked again—sure enough it was Andy! There he stood, just as he had stood a year ago, and he looked almost the same. He stood for a moment between his grandfather's knees, with his eyes fixed upon the fire, then, still without speaking a word, he turned gently, pulled open his grandfather's coat, and put his hand into the pocket, and drew forth that hard dried piece of white bread and held it in his hand, then with the other he seized the old man's coat.

"Come along, grandfather, come along," he said, in his old pathetic tones.

The old man half rose from his seat, and looked around wildly with glazed, heavy eyes.

"Ay, ay," he murmured, then he sank down in his seat again, his eyes closed, and his head drooped upon his breast.

When the Christmas bells rang out with a heavy clang for midnight, they found grandfather sitting in his chair quite dead. His head had fallen forward, his hands hung beside him, and on the floor at his feet lay the crust of bread which Andy had left. Perhaps his spirit had gone from the earth to join Andy on the Fairy Island in the sea.

. . . . . .

As Amy finished, still kneeling on the hearth, with her little hands clasped upon my knee, all the girls, in a perfect rapture of delight, kissed her; her father cried, "Well done, little woman," and I, noticing that her eyes were heavy, lifted her in my arms and carried her up to bed, a luxury which she enjoyed hugely. She clasped her arms about my neck, and kissed me, for as soon as we got out of Kate's hearing I promised to send her a perfect little angel of a dog when I got back to town.

CHAPTER IV.

HALF-A-DOZEN days of wild winter weather, then the tempest lulled, the winds hushed themselves, the hail and rain ceased to fall; and I, accompanied as usual by Shawn, prepared to emerge from the cosy warmth of the Lodge in search of sport.

"True winter weather, sir," said Father John, who had looked in for a minute or so in passing; and, indeed true winter weather it seemed, for the priest's fingers were blue, and his round handsome face had also a bluish tinge; it quickly disappeared, however, before a glass or two of Jamieson.

"By the way, Mister Kenmare," said the jovial ecclesiastic as he rose to go, "I'm sadly afraid, sir, that that man of yours, Conolly Magrath, will get himself into trouble; 'tis but three nights ago since he was nearly surprised heading a Ribbon meeting which was held at the house of Mrs Timlin; and only last night, I'm told, the police entered his cabin and found a gun which was loaded, and quietly hidden away. At the time of the seizure the man was heavy with the drink—a sore curse to the country, sir," he added in an aside to me,—"and he set upon the peelers; but they were one too many for him, since the upshot of it was that they seized the gun, and paid Mr Conolly for his resistance. This morning at daybreak I received a call to come and give him absolution—I'm on my way to him now."

From the leisurely manner in which the priest had thought fit to obey the

summon, I imagined that Mr Conolly could not be at death's door; but I, feeling interested, offered to accompany the priest—my uncle, who looked very grave over the matter, volunteered to go too; so we three set off together. I shouldered my gun, and ordered Shawn to follow, at some slight interval of time, with the dogs.

We found Conolly looking rather the worse for the adventure, but by no means moribund; he had received a few cuts about the head and face, and had lost a considerable deal of blood. He lay stretched upon the outside of his bed; and my uncle frowned as he saw that he was being attended to by the republican-minded Mrs Timlin. I was glad to find matters no worse, for I had grown to take considerable interest in Conolly. When Shawn appeared with the dogs, I followed him with a contented mind.

What a day it was! The wind was certainly lulled to rest, but the fierce rollers of the Atlantic still dashed wildly in upon the sand and around the jagged cliffs, which stood like gaunt spectres, towering up amidst a chilly shower of foam. But the greensward above was sparkling with the radiance of a thousand gems; the air was crisp and sharp, and the frozen ground crackled and glistened beneath my feet. The estuaries were perfectly alive with birds; wild duck and widgeon were paddling leisurely about; the golden plover were running and pecking on the sand, wild geese were lighting on the promontory beyond, and countless sea-gulls were hovering in the clear frosty air. The long range of hills stretched in one jet black line along the clear horizon; and the tiny thatched hamlets, which were dotted here and there on the hillsides, like sea birds crouching for shelter amidst thick clumps of purple heather, were thrown

out and glorified by the clear frosty background.

I had come out intending to have a day on the low-lying marshes, among the snipe; and I knew that my cartridge belt was crammed with cartridges loaded with number seven; but the sight of all these birds tempted me, and I suggested that, even with number seven, we should make a trial at the ducks.

But Shawn, wiser than I, shook his head.

"'Twould be but wasting good powder and shot, yer honor," said he. "Sure at the present time they're as wild as wild can be, and wouldn't let ye come widin five hundred yards o' them. After a little shpell o' quiet weather they'll be worth a trial, but not to-day. Sure your honor would do far better to keep to the shnipe."

So to the snipe I accordingly kept, beating the low-lying marshes with a couple of my uncle's best setters; and I was rewarded for my pains; the frost had drawn them in by

dozens, and I managed to make a considerable bag.

We had still another bit of land to beat—and were about to make our way towards it; when we were arrested by three shrill whistles which reached us from the road. I turned at once, and saw the figures of a man and a woman standing together on the road a few hundred yards away; the man was waving his hat, the woman was standing on the roadside hard by waving her handkerchief.

"That last marsh will keep," I said, turning to Shawn. "I've had enough for to-day, whistle up the dogs and follow me to the road; we'll walk home that way with Miss Oona."

For I had recognised Oona at the first glance; the man I could not identify, but when I got to the road I saw it was young Bingley of Gulranny. Both of them had changed with the changing weather. I saw Oona for the first time wrapped up in heavy

furs, and very pretty indeed she looked in them; while young Bingley, having discarded the kilt, had his legs completely covered by a pair of quaintly cut knee-breeches.

"Jack," said Oona, after I had shaken hands with Charlie, "we've disturbed you at your sport."

I hastened to assure her that this was not the case; that I had quite finished and was on my way to the Lodge; and I fancied that Oona looked particularly pleased with the information.

"In that case," she continued, "you will not mind walking home by the road with me, will you? Mr Murray is at the Lodge; he and Charlie are going to stay with us till the morning. You'll not be long making your call, will you?" she said, turning to Bingley; "we shall walk very slowly so that you can overtake us."

"No, I sha'n't be long," returned he; "but I think—in fact I know, I can't

stop at the Lodge to-night; I must get home."

He stammered, turned red, and looked very uncomfortable as he spoke, and it dawned upon me that there was something wrong. Bingley looked positively wretched, and there was decidedly a false ring about Oona's careless laugh. I noticed, too, that she, usually the most hospitable of girls, made no attempt to urge him to remain; she seemed somewhat relieved, too, when at last she found herself free of his company and walking along by my side.

"Well, Oona," I said, when we were alone, "what brought over Murray and Charlie to-day?"

"They heard that Conolly was killed, and they rode over to hear about it."

"And they are going to stop all night?"

"They were; but I don't know *now*. You heard Charlie say he must get home!"

"He seems to have changed his mind very suddenly."

"Yes—did you have good sport to-day?"

"Capital. How came you to be on the road with Bingley?"

"I was walking with him. He had a call to make on one of his mother's fishermen, who lives in one of those huts yonder."

"And you volunteered to walk with him?"

"No, he asked me, and I thought I should enjoy the walk."

"And did you?"

"Why, of course I did; don't I always enjoy walking, Jack?"

"I am not talking of always, but of now. Did you enjoy your walk with Bingley. Oona?"

"What a question!" said Oona, laughing; "I suppose I should have enjoyed it very much if I hadn't got tired. Then I caught sight of you beating the marshes, and I asked Charlie to whistle you up, which he did. Any more questions?"

"Yes, one more. Tell me, Oona," and I bent down to look in her face, "what

did Bingley *say* to you during your walk to-day?"

What Oona would have replied, I don't know, for at that moment our conversation was rudely interrupted by a wild voice which spoke rapidly and clearly in the Irish tongue. We both started; looked up, and saw at once the cause of the disturbance. I suppose we had loitered, for Shawn with the dogs had managed to get well ahead of us; he now stood in the road, facing the person, the sound of whose voice had so rudely disturbed our *tête-à-tête.*

That person was a woman whom I now recognised as having seen once or twice before during my solitary rambles on the bog; a woman who had succeeded on more than one occasion in arousing my curiosity, but about whom I had always forgotten to question my cousins.

She was certainly a lady: her face, though pinched and worn-looking, and

white as that of a corpse, bore the unmistakable stamp of high breeding. Her figure was angular, and clad as usual in black, while her eyes glared like two wild lights from their cavernous sockets. She seemed to be quite seventy years of age. On her left shoulder was the only bit of colour to be found upon her, and that looked like a random splash of blood; on nearer inspection one discovered it to be a bit of crimson cloth, ragged and torn, which had been carefully stitched upon her dress. She was evidently very much excited, for, as far as I could make out, she seemed to be pouring upon Shawn a perfect hurricane of abuse, and once or twice I fancied I saw her raise her right hand as if to strike him. To my amazement Shawn took all this without a word; he hung his head, shuffled his feet, flicked the dog-whip which he held in his hand, but said nothing. I was about to hurry forward and ask an explanation

of the whole affair, when I felt a detaining hand laid upon my arm, and looking round I saw Oona, white as a ghost, and trembling in every limb. She had understood every word of the wild Irish harangue.

"Don't go forward, Jack," she pleaded earnestly. "It's only Mrs Gregory."

"Only Mrs Gregory!"

"Yes. She is aunt to Mr O'Neil, the landlord here. She is a little violent at times, but after all it's no wonder, poor thing!"

"But what have I done to her, Oona?"

"Nothing, and she is saying nothing to you, but it seems that the dogs have been scampering through her potato fields and breaking down the bines— Now, don't go forward, Jack!—you might be induced to answer her roughly, and I wouldn't have that for the world."

I looked at Oona and saw at once that she was terribly in earnest; her cheeks were pale; her eyes full of tears. At that

moment Mrs Gregory, having said her say, passed on. Shawn, now holding the offending dogs on a leash, followed her; next came Oona and myself.

Both my interest and curiosity were aroused by this time, and I would fain have learned more of this extraordinary woman, but the sound of her voice had thrown Oona into such a state of agitation, that I thought it better to turn the conversation to lighter themes; silently determining however to elicit the whole story from Shawn, when next we should find ourselves together.

When we reached the Lodge a fresh surprise awaited us. Right before the hall-door was young Bingley on horseback saying "Good-bye" all round. He looked rather shamefaced at seeing us, and confessed that he had avoided us by taking a short cut across the hills. My former suspicions were certainties now. I knew he had asked Oona to be his wife, and

the knowledge of why she had refused him gave me a better appetite for dinner.

There was a jolly party at the Lodge that night. Though Bingley had departed, Murray remained, and from the way he looked at Aileen it was not difficult to guess the reason. Father John and the doctor were there; both well on in their cups, and ready with story and song; while in the kitchen sat Conolly, very much disfigured, but looking happy through it all, since he had heard that very afternoon that Mr O'Neil, on being told of the seizure of the gun, had been taken with violent trembling, and had sent word to the barracks that he must be attended by a stronger guard of police.

"Sure he's an *omadhaun*, yer honor," said Conolly contemptuously, as he told me the story; "he's no better than a woman, and not half so good as some. And 'tis him, and such as him, as own the broad acres of Ireland."

I may add, in passing, that it is as bad for an Irish landlord to be a coward as a tyrant. They may respect a tyrant, even while they hate him—but they will never respect a coward.

The evening passed away merrily enough, but just as it was drawing to a close, a message came to the Lodge for Kathleen. A little child belonging to one of the crofters had been taken ill, and she was begged "for the love of God" come. The child's father brought the message: he was waiting in the kitchen for the answer, Mary said. Kathleen put on her bonnet and cloak to walk back with him, but I expressed my determination to see her safely there and home again; so while she was getting ready, I went to the kitchen to tell the man he might go.

I said what I had to say, had got half way back to the dining-room, when I paused, turned and looked at the man

again. He was about the handsomest man I had seen since I came to Storport, but it was not this fact which commanded my attention so much as the strange, unaccountable expression on his face. He was not more than thirty years of age; yet his hair was as grey as my uncle's, who had passed his sixtieth year, while his bronzed face was marked with premature lines. When I mentioned this fact to Kathleen, she sighed, and said, "No wonder, poor fellow!" but she said no more.

We set out at once, and both enjoyed our walk. The night was clear — the air frosty: already the roads were hardening, while above our heads the moon, full and clear, sailed in a cloudless sky.

We had walked quickly; but the man had reached home first, for when we entered the cabin he was there. I was not surprised to see Kath-

leen give him a hearty hand-shake, but I confess I was startled to see her walk up to a woman who sat on a bench by the fire with her apron over her head—take her in her arms, and kiss her. This action on the part of my cousin made me look at the woman again. The apron by this time was removed, and I saw a face—white, wild, and sorrow-stricken—yet strangely beautiful. Though she was evidently only a peasant—and wore the homeliest of peasant dresses—her little feet were encased in thick leather boots, and her hands were delicately and prettily formed. From her appearance I thought she might be a lady masquerading in a peasant's dress. She clung about my cousin's neck, and sobbed,—

"Oh, Miss Kathleen, I can't bear it. Sure I can't keep in Storport with Mrs Gregory!"

Mrs Gregory again! I started in astonishment as this pretty, trembling creature

pronounced the name of my mysterious old lady of the hills. "What influence can Mrs Gregory have here?" I asked myself, and having by this time grown thoroughly interested, I waited to hear more; I was therefore rather sorry when I saw the man come forward and lay his hands gently upon the girl's shoulder.

"Rosie, *machree*," he said, "sure 'tis not like *you* to go on like this. Come, get up, *mavourneen;* Miss Kathleen is goin' to look at little May; and here is the young mashter too, that's come with Miss Kathleen from the Lodge."

This last piece of news produced the desired effect. The girl cast her eyes round the kitchen, and for the first time saw me standing near the door. She unclasped her arms from Kathleen's neck, rose, smoothed back her lovely black hair, curtesied, and murmured, "You're welcome, sir!" at the same time she drew

up a form beside the fire, and begged me to be seated.

I could never bear to see a woman cry, especially a young and pretty one: and when I looked into Rose's pitiful face, I felt inclined to do what my cousin had done already—take her in my arms and kiss her. As this was not feasible, however, I contented myself with taking her pretty hand, and holding it for a moment between my own; then when she drew it away, I took the seat which she had offered me by the fire.

Then I saw that Kathleen had gone towards the bed, and was bending over a child.

The cabin was a poor one,—about the poorest on the Storport estate; but though it resembled its fellows in most ways, it differed from them in one. It had the usual black rafters above, mud floor below; turf fire on the floor, and cauldron, ever reminding one of the witch scene in

"Macbeth." At one end of the room was strewn a little straw, which I noticed at once was fresh and clean; and upon this reposed the cow,—a few hens were roosting among the rafters, and a fat pig lay lazily beside the fire. The only furniture in the room was a table, a couple of forms, and a bed; all as clean and fresh-looking as new drawn milk; while on the bed, between the fresh clean sheets, lay the prettiest little creature imaginable.

Little May was about five years old, and though only a peasant's offspring was as delicately organised as a little fairy. She had her mother's black hair and dark dreamy eyes, and evidently her mother's excitability, for her little hands were clammy and trembled nervously. She was clearly suffering from an attack of some kind of fever, for her face was flushed, and her eyes were most unnaturally bright. Kathleen felt her pulse; laid her cool hand upon the child's forehead, then turning to

the mother, asked if "May" had been frightened again.

"Sure enough, Miss Kathleen," returned Rose, "and 'twill always be the same as long as we stop in Storport."

Kathleen took the girl's trembling hand.

"Tell me about it, Rose," she said in her quiet way.

"She was out by herself to-day," said Rose. "I let her go, for I was in dread to see her looking so pale, and I thought no harm would come to her; when she was coming home she met Mrs Gregory; she tried to run away for she's terrified at sight of her, but before she had gone far Mrs Gregory seized her, lifted her up—showed her that red thing on her shoulder, and told her—and told her—oh, Miss Kathleen, I can't tell you what she told her!"

"Yes, yes," said Kathleen, "I understand. Well, is there anything more?"

"In troth, Miss Kathleen, then there

is. When she saw May was frightened, she laughed and clutched her tight, and walked away with her, and May was too frightened to move. She carried her to the lake in the swamps, took hold of the back of her dress and held her over the water, and when May screamed she only laughed, and said she liked people to feel what suffering was; that, if she thought they wouldn't hang her, she'd throw May in and let her drown, just for the pleasure of seeing *my* face when her dead body was washed ashore."

I saw Kathleen's brow grow ominously dark.

"It is shocking, shocking!" she said. "Well, Rose, I suppose there is nothing more?"

"Indeed, miss, and there is. She held poor May like that, and dipped her over and over again deep down into the freezing waters, till, what with the fright and the cold, she was almost dead; then she

threw her on the ground like a dog, and told her to go home and tell me that Mrs Gregory had done it."

"Do you know, Rose, this is actionable? I think you must summon Mrs Gregory, and have her bound over to keep the peace."

To my amazement, Rose trembled more violently than before.

"No, no, I couldn't do that, miss," she exclaimed. "I couldn't go into a court. I—I'd sooner go right away."

"Away from your home and country, do you mean?"

"I do, miss. Sure, what is home and country to me now? I asked Michael to-night, and he said he was quite willing—that it might be better for us to go to America. There's only the three of us, you know, miss; we've got enough money to take us, and I'm sure Michael would get on."

"Yes, I think he would," returned

Kathleen. "And so you are willing to go, Michael?"

"I am, miss," said the man quietly; and Kathleen rose to go.

"Well," she said, "I will speak to my father about it, and we'll see what can be done. Meantime, I must put little May right for you. I'll give Shawn a parcel to leave here on his way home."

Michael, as Kate had called him, offered to fetch the parcel himself, but Kate assured him it was not necessary. Shawn had to pass the cabin on his way home, and he might just as well leave it. Then we took our leave.

"Kate," I said, when we were well clear of the cabin, "what has Mrs Gregory to do with these people?"

Kate answered my question with another.

"What do you know about Mrs Gregory?" she said.

"Not much. I have met her twice

on the hills, I think, and to-day I saw her again, wildly abusing Shawn because the dogs had run through her potato field."

"Ah, she is a terrible woman," said Kate; "and the marvel to me is that she wasn't shot down long ago like—but there, it is a long story, and a shocking story, Jack. I think, now you've seen Rose, Michael, and Mrs Gregory, I must tell it you, but not to-night."

During the next three days we were too much occupied either for me to remind Kathleen of her promise, or for her to remember it. Conolly was summoned for assaulting the police, and but for my uncle's interference, it might have gone hardly with him; as it was, he received the sentence of a fine—a tolerably heavy one—which my uncle paid, to the great disgust, as we learned afterwards, of Mr O'Neil of the Castle.

After this excitement was over, I re-

minded Kathleen of her promise, and she told me the story of Rose Merton.

I.

"Yer honor, for the love of Almighty God, lave me in peace this night. My poor wife is dying, sor—dying wid the fever that's come to her through lack o' food; you'll never have the heart to do that thing this night!"

The speaker, a wild, gaunt, famine-stricken man clad in the wretchedest of rags, knelt on the ground, and almost kissed the feet of the man to whom he prayed. They were the centre figures of a large crowd of men, women, and children, some of them almost as ragged and spectre-like as the supplicant himself. The night was dark, the rain was falling, and the wind blew coldly upon the saturated rags which clung to their famished forms: the sky was jet black overhead, save here and

there where the lightning played, but the faces of the crowd which had gathered around the miserable dwelling of James Merton were faintly illuminated by the hissing and flaring torches of bog fir held on high by several hands.

But the wild red light was strongest upon the two principal figures of the group; James Merton, wild, ragged, and terror-stricken, crouching upon the ground; Mr Gregory, the landlord, cold and impassive as marble, towering above him.

When the man made his piteous appeal, the woe-begone members of the crowd seemed to hush themselves and listen. What would the master reply? Would he not show one grain of mercy, and leave this poor wretched creature a few hours of peace to comfort his dying wife? They waited, but he said nothing: one glance into the cold marble-like face, showed them what he meant to do.

Mr Gregory was by no means a popular

landlord; indeed his reign had been one of merciless tyranny—ever since he purchased the estate, and came to dwell in Storport, now nearly twenty years before, the air had been full of wailing voices, and the churchyard rapidly filled with dead; hundreds of his tenants had been turned into living cargo for the American ships; while others had been left to die like beasts upon the road. His motto was pay, or go. When the rent was not forthcoming, the tenant was shipped off to try his fortune in foreign lands; when the tenant could not be got to leave the hut, it was razed to the ground. This system of things had been in vogue, as I have said, for nigh upon twenty years, and still Mr Gregory lived, committing every year fresh outrages, fresh cruelties; but he had capped the most atrocious of his deeds that night, when he had ordered that the machine of his own invention should be

carried down to unroof the miserable hut of James Merton.

Merton was certainly the poorest man on the Storport estate; he had begun life badly, with a piece of land which was devoid of all nutrition, and a hut which was likely at any moment to tumble about his ears; besides this, he had a fragile, delicate wife, and a pretty, little delicate-looking daughter: but he was a hard-working, honourable man; he tilled his bit of land, and managed every year to satisfy the demands of the landlord, voracious as they were. At last, however, he found he could do so no longer. He looked at his wife one morning, and started as if he had looked upon the dead: he saw the truth. Every time he had laid his money upon Mr Gregory's table, he had laid there a drop from the life-blood of his wife. She had paid the landlord, but she was gradually but surely parting with her life. James Merton, rough man as he was, felt a choking sensation come

into his throat, and he bent above the turf sods which lay upon the floor, to hide a few scalding tears. He loved his wife. Unlike most Storport marriages, his had been a romantic one, since he had been content to take to his hearth a portionless girl, merely because he loved her: besides this want of dowry, it had been considered by almost every boy in Storport that Rose Monnaghan was not a desirable match. She was too delicate to work in the fields as other women did, or to go bare-footed and bare-headed to face every inclement season of the year: but it was these very facts which attracted James Merton, and made the great strong man love the girl who seemed to him like a delicate flower; and Rose loved her husband, and was happy, save now and then when her delicate conscience smote her for having brought him no fortune as other girls brought to their husbands; and when she reflected that she could not

help him as they helped theirs by working in the fields, and carrying home the household turf. Still she tried to make up for it in other ways. She kept her hut as clean as a palace, she was handy at mending her husband's clothes, and when she found that their moderate income was insufficient to meet the demands, she quietly decided that since she was the helpless one she must be the one to suffer; so although the stern landlord was satisfied, she felt that she was travelling slowly the downward path of life. When Merton discovered the sacrifice that she had made, he uttered no word, but instead of going to his work that morning, he walked over to the dispensary, and had a word with the doctor. Two days later Dr Maguire called at the hut, and before he left, he had ordered Rose Merton to eat meat and drink wine.

Eat meat and drink wine! where were they to come from? Rose knew very well she could scarcely get milk to wash down

the potatoes which were her only food. She ceased, therefore, to think of the doctor's advice: but her husband remembered it.

When the rent day came, and the tenants, according to a rule established by Mr Gregory, went up to the Castle with their rent, Merton went with the rest; his name being called, he entered the room which had been converted into a kind of office, and placed his little heap of silver on the table at which the landlord sat. Then he paused, looked at the stern face of his master, and turned about the hat which he held in his hand.

"Well," said Mr Gregory, "have you anything to say to me?"

"I have, yer honor!"

"Out with it then. My time is precious, to-day!"

"Well, yer honor, 'tis just this; the rent o' the bit o' land that I have is a

heap too high; yer honor, it is not worth what I have to pay!"

The landlord turned round and looked at his tenant.

"My good man," he said, "allow me to tell you that the land is worth just as much as I can get for it. If you are not satisfied with it, leave it. I've no doubt I'd get a little more from somebody else!"

"'Tis not that, yer honor," said Merton quietly. "I don't want to go, I only wanted to tell yer honor that the rent was high."

"And how, may I ask, did you make that discovery?"

Merton paused for a moment: then he told the truth. He told how his poor wife had been starving herself in order to keep her husband right with the landlord; he told of the doctor's visit; of the doctor's orders; and he added,—

"If yer honor would be so good as to

take down the rent, I could maybe get the things for my poor wife—"

"Then make up your mind once and for ever, that I shall not do anything of the kind," interrupted Mr Gregory, impatiently. "If all my tenants got reductions on account of sickly wives, I wonder how *my* family would live! *No!* you must pay the rent, or go. As for your wife, I suppose the hospital or workhouse is open to her as well as to others."

He opened the door, hustled him out, and called in another.

When the next pay day came round, Merton laid on the table just the half of his usual sum, and in answer to the landlord's look of astonishment, he said doggedly,—

"That's all I've got, yer honor!"

"Then what do you mean to do?—go?"

"I do *not*, yer honor—plaise God, you shall have the rest of it the next time."

But that time never came; each pay

day Merton found he could only send about the half of his rent to the landlord; so one day he was served with a summons, and a notice to quit.

What was he to do? The little sustenance which he was able to get for his wife had not been sufficient to eradicate the seeds of the disease which had been sown by years of insufficient food. Each day found her worse; and when the summons and notice to quit were put into his hand, she was lying in the bed slowly dying of consumption. James Merton thought a while; then he determined to make one last appeal to his master. He quietly put the summonses in his pocket, and sat by the bedside holding between his the parched and feverish hand of his wife; when she had fallen into a doze, he left his little daughter to watch her, and walked himself up to the landlord's house. The family had just finished dinner, and when

Merton was shown into the dining-room he found Mr Gregory alone, still lingering over his nuts and wine. If Gregory had looked up, he would have seen that the man's face was white and haggard, and almost desperate in its agony—but he did not look up—he continued to crack his nuts, and sip his wine, and asked carelessly,—

"Well, what is it?"

Morton drew the papers from his pocket and laid them on the table.

"Does yer honor know," he asked, "that I have got these?"

"Of course!"

"And what does yer honor think that I can do?"

"You'll have to do exactly what those papers say—pay your rent or go!"

"Yer honor, I *can't* pay the rent!"

"Then you must go!"

"And I can't do that neither, yer honor!"

Mr Gregory went on carelessly cracking his nuts:

"It's no use coming to me with stories of that kind," he said, "I'm used to them, therefore they make no impression upon me. You ought to know by this time I mean what I say—therefore, if you won't pay your rent, and won't give up possession of your hut, you'll be turned out neck and crop, that's all."

"Yer honor," cried the man piteously, "think of my poor wife!"

"Think of your wife!" returned the landlord contemptuously. "If you had done that yourself she wouldn't be in my power to-day—she'd be lying in one of the wards of the workhouse! There, get out, I've no more time to waste—I want to have a quiet evening!"

And before Merton could think of another word to say, he found that he had been hustled out of the house, and was walking dejectedly home again.

These constant interviews with the landlord were changing the man's whole nature, and as he walked home that day there was a desperate look about his eyes and mouth which showed the resolution he had taken. He meant to defy the landlord. He meant to let his suffering wife have at least the comfort of dying beneath her husband's roof, with her husband's hands to tend her, and his voice to soothe.

During the next three days Merton had no time even to think of the landlord: his wife grew rapidly worse; and it took all his care to alleviate the suffering which none could cure.

At the end of three days he was reminded of his position by Mr Gregory himself, who looked in and asked him if he was ready to deliver up possession of his hut. For answer, Merton pointed to his wife. She lay upon the bed, worn to a skeleton; her cheeks

flushed with the fever which consumed her; her eyes already dim with approaching death. She saw and heard; and dying, as she was, her only thought was for her husband and child.

"Yer honor," she murmured feebly, stretching out towards him her trembling hand, "don't be too hard on my husband, and my poor little motherless child. It will be right again for them when I am gone away."

Without a word the landlord turned and left the cabin.

Three days later he appeared again, on a wild inclement evening, which had been ushered in with biting winds and heavily falling rain. This time he was not alone: he had been through the village that day, collecting rent from some, serving processes on others, and razing to the ground the huts of those who could not be made to go.

Since he had come to Storport he had invented a machine which at one fell swoop could unroof a cabin, and leave the helpless inmates at the mercy of wind and rain. The machine had committed ravages that day: it was night-fall before it was set down near the hut of James Merton.

For the most part of that day the poor fellow had sat like one in a terrible dream, watching the light of life gradually fade from the eyes of the wife he loved so well. When night fell, and he heard the murmuring of the crowd which gathered round his hut, he walked to the door, saw, and understood. With a low wail of terror and misery he staggered forward like a drunken man, and fell at his master's feet.

"Yer honor!" he moaned; "for the love of God!"

But the landlord said nothing: he shook

off the man as if he had been a reptile, and ordered his men to proceed.

The evening had begun badly, but as every hour advanced it grew worse and worse. By this time the wind blew as bitterly as any wind in winter, and the rain was mingled with large drops of hail. A wild night for those who had food and shelter—a pitiable one on which to unroof a hut above a dying woman's head. Yet it was done that night. Amidst the groans of the assembled crowd, and in spite of the piteous pleading of James Merton, the machine was set to work, and in five minutes all that was left of the hut was four miserable walls.

. . . . . .

When dawn broke, over tracks of sodden bogland and a limitless expanse of sea, it showed James Merton sitting amongst the ruins of his hut beside the rain-drenched

corpse of his wife. Beside him was his little daughter, shivering in the saturated rags which hung about her, and gazing with wistful eyes at all she saw. For she was too young to understand; she only knew that her home was a ruin, and that her mother was stiff and cold.

II.

Twelve years after the events chronicled above, amidst the glorious sunset of a lovely autumn day, a young girl, none other, indeed, than little Rose Merton, was walking slowly along the high road which led to Storport. Rose was now eighteen years of age. She was tall and shapely, with a pretty face, and large dark eyes, which, when they gazed at you straight, had a strange, wistful expression—the very look which had been implanted there that terrible night when she

sat with her father among the ruined walls of her home.

The sunset was glowing all round her; making a picture of the dreary waste; picking out the little clumps of purple heather, the great black turf stacks erected on the bog, and the ragged figures of men and women who toiled wearily over the wastes with creels upon their backs. But Rose, walking slowly along the road, looked neither to the right nor to the left, but kept her eyes fixed steadily upon the ground as if in deep thought.

Suddenly a hand was placed upon her shoulder—she gave a half-stifled cry, turned round, and looked straight into the face of a man.

"Michael!" she gasped, trying to force a smile, and then she held out her hand.

"Why, Rose, what a start I gave ye," said Michael Jamieson, taking her hand and

keeping it; "I was cutting turf on the bog yonder when I saw ye pass,—but now I'm done. I mean to walk and have a talk with ye to-night. But first, Rose, darlin', won't you give me a kiss?"

Now, for the first time, the girl raised her eyes, and glanced keenly at the prospect about her; then she answered quietly, with some nervousness and hesitation,—

"Yes, Michael, if—if you like."

"If I like!" echoed Michael, putting his arm around her and kissing her pretty lips again and again; "I should think I did like, Rose. . . . Why, *mavourneen*," he added suddenly, "what's the matter? Why do you turn your face away from me?"

The girl, still nervous and ill at ease, answered strangely,—

"It's nothing—nothing—"

They were walking side by side by this time; again Rose's eyes were fixed wist-

fully upon the ground. The young man was watching her face.

"Rose," he said presently, "I'm in dread there's something on your mind. Of late ye haven't seemed like the bold, brave *colleen* I used to know. Well, I know, you're sorely tried at home. Your father's too much in with the Ribbon boys, *machree*, and if he don't mind it's the young mashter that'll be turning him out of house and home!"

The girl started; then she looked up with a smile.

"Sure, he'll never do that, Michael," she said.

"Why not?"

She laughed rather nervously.

"Never mind, but there's no fear of that?"

"Why not, Rose," asked her companion somewhat sternly.

"Well—because—the masther has promised to be his friend."

He started and grew pale as a ghost.

"Promised!" he echoed; "who has he promised?"

"Me," returned the girl, growing more and more nervous. "I—I spoke to him."

"*You!*" echoed the man, now paler than before; "*you* spoke to the young mashter?"

"Sure, there was no harm!" returned Rose. "Yes, Michael, I spoke to him, and oh, you don't know how kind he is!"

"He's a heap too kind when a pretty girl comes near him."

"That's nonsense, Michael."

"I don't know," returned the young fellow. "I've heard tales; but there, what a fool I am, as if I couldn't trust *you* to speak wid the *dioul* himself. Don't mind me, Rose, 'tis only my jealous way. I'll behave better when I've got ye all to

myself. Rose, darlin," he added, bending a bit nearer to her, "when's the day to be?"

"What day, Michael?"

"As if *you* didn't know; why our marriage day—to be sure!"

The girl gently withdrew her hand from his.

"Don't talk about that," she said.

"But I must talk about it, Rose. You've put me off long enough, and you can't say I haven't been patient. Come, look me in the face, *machree*. Why should you be ashamed? We've been lovers ever since we were children, and some day soon we must be something more."

But the girl positively shuddered.

"'Tis folly to talk of it," she said, "least of all *now*."

"Why not now, Rose?"

"Because the world and God are both against us. You know I've got no fortune,

not so much as a hen; and you—you are poorer than ever now."

The young man smiled,—

"Don't you know what the song says?" he answered lightly, "'Sure poverty's no sin!' I don't want your fortune, darlin', I want but you; and as to myself, sure enough I'm poor, but I feel if I had but got you by my fireside to help and comfort me I could do the work of three."

"Ah, that's what they all say before they marry; but afterwards it's all sorrow and tears. No, Michael, it can't be. I've seen too much of it. Look all round us. Sure there's nothing but trouble and hunger, and every hut has got more mouths than it can feed. Why should *we* marry, to make one more wretched home?"

"Rose!"

"Well, Michael."

"I don't think them words came out of

your right heart. Something has changed you. Some rascal has been turning you against me!"

"No, no, Michael," cried the girl hurriedly, "'tis not that."

"But it is. I've seen it a long time back. I've said little, but it made my heart bleed. Rose, a little while ago you didn't look like that or talk as you talk now, and you used to be as bright as a May mornin', and as kind as a *colleen* could be. Rose, what has changed you? why do you shrink away when I put my arm around you, and tremble when I kiss your cheek? Oh, Rose, Rose, I've loved you ever since I could think or dream what love meant, and are you goin' to leave me now?"

Pale and tremulous the girl turned towards him and put her little hands in his; it was an impetuous movement, which told him he had touched her heart.

"Michael," she cried, almost sobbing, "I love you—God knows I love you!"

He took her hands, held them firmly in his, and looked steadily into her eyes.

"You love me," he said; "me, and no other?"

"You and no other, dear," answered the girl, not flinching from his gaze; "but, oh, Michael," she added, quietly drawing her hands away, "don't let us think of it, we—we're too poor. God is against us!"

"God's never against true lovers, Rose," answered the young fellow steadily; "and if your heart's not changed, 'tis His will that we should come together."

"Ah, no, no!"

"Rose!"

"I—I can't bear it, Michael. I can't face it," cried the girl, now almost sobbing. 'I'm not like other girls; I think I'm too

weak, and you'll say I'm a coward, but I know what poverty means. Michael, listen to me. Don't be angry, but listen. Suppose I could help you a thousand times better by *not* marrying you, suppose I could keep not only you, but father, and everybody in Storport from poverty and trouble, and all by *not* marrying you, what would you say to that?"

The young fellow stared at her in blank amazement.

"What do you mean?" he asked; "I don't rightly understand."

The girl turned away her head.

"Nothing," she answered; "I mean nothing; I'm silly, and don't know what I'm saying!"

"Rose," said Michael solemnly, taking her hands and forcing her to look at him, "tell me, swear to me, you don't love another man?"

"I don't."

"Swear it!" he repeated, almost fiercely.

"Well then, Michael, I swear it."

"Then if that's true, kiss me, Rose, and speak not another word o' sorrow or parting. I see what it is, your father has been bringing trouble to the house, and your heart is a bit down. It was the trouble that spoke, not my own Rose. Kiss me again, *mavourneen*, better times will come; they *must* come; but never say they'll come to us two apart; for without you my life would be wasted, and my heart would break!"

He folded his arms around her and held her close, kissing her cheek and lips, and Rose, clinging to him as if for protection, shed a few silent tears. The bright glow of sunset had faded, and the prospect all round was growing as sombre as the black-looking bog. The lovers walked on, hand-

in-hand until they reached the hut which was Michael's home. There they paused, and he asked Rose to come in, but the girl shook her head.

"Not to-night, Michael," she said; "good-bye."

"Good-bye! No, I mane to go along home with you."

Again the girl's agitation returned.

"No, no," she said; "not to-night. I —I've a message—I must go alone; but you may meet me to-morrow."

"You wish it, darlin'?"

"Yes, I do!"

"Then so it shall be; your will is law to me. I'll try and find out what's doing among the boys; mischief, I'm afraid. Good-night, Rose—good-night."

One kiss and then they parted; Rose walking quickly across the bog until she reached her home.

III.

The only home which Rose Merton had ever known was a wretched hovel, built of moss-covered stones and mud, and roofed with sods of turf. It contained but one room, which was clean and neat, for Rose had inherited her mother's cleanliness as well as her beauty. The hut was empty; so before sitting down to indulge in reflections, Rose set about preparing her father's supper. Her first care was to remove her bonnet and shawl, and tie on a large apron of coarse holland; then she stood for a moment before the old cracked looking-glass which was nailed up to the wall, to arrange her pretty black hair. Then she set to work. She knocked together the few sods of turf which lay smouldering on the hearth, filled the black cauldron with potatoes, lifted it on to the

hook which dangled at the end of the thick black chain suspended from the rafters, and her task was done. While she waited for the potatoes to boil, she sat down on the form which stood near the fire and began to think.

First she thought of Michael, and of the interview which she had just had with him; then she thought of young Mr Gregory, the master of Storport.

It was now some time since the young man, attracted by the girl's pretty face and gentle manners, had been secretly paying his court to her. At first Rose, though certainly flattered by the young master's attentions, had quietly resisted him, for she had promised to marry Michael Jamieson, as handsome and as hard-working a boy as there was in Storport, but afterwards, after much mental deliberation, Rose's mind gradually changed. She knew

that despite his steady, hard work, Michael Jamieson was excessively poor, having scarcely enough to feed himself and his old mother who lived with him; therefore it was an indiscreet thing to ask in marriage a portionless girl like herself. Besides, she had been somewhat delicately nurtured, and was therefore not a fit helpmate for a Storport boy. She had never been accustomed to work in the fields; but by dint of her own sharpness, and a taste for sewing, she had managed to gain a little knowledge of dressmaking. In pursuit of this occupation she went about from hut to hut, picking up a few shillings or a meal, and sometimes she went for a few days to Ballyshanrany to work for my cousins. But Rose had never been able to save and accumulate a fortune like other girls, for her father's hut and wretched plot of land were

heavily rented, and her father spent a good deal in drink. Besides the grim pinch of poverty, there were other things which made her gradually look less coldly upon the attentions of the master. The feeling of revolt against want and wretchedness, which was gradually spreading over Ireland, had already touched Storport—the village was known to hold a band of Ribbonmen in its heart; and Rose felt tolerably sure that the leading spirit of the band was her own father.

At the rising of the people she was not astonished; they were desperate men — turned almost into beasts by years of cruel oppression, and now they rose up, like gaunt spectres from the grave, prepared to strike for home and kindred. Rose was terrified, and for the first time she asked herself,—

"Why should I not listen to the mas-

ter? If I were to marry him I could save them all!"

It was the first time she had put her thoughts into words, and the words shocked her. For she loved Michael Jamieson, and she did not love Mr Gregory; therefore, it required a good deal of mental deliberation to bring her round to the thought of marrying him. Nevertheless, the decision was ultimately arrived at. Rose determined to sacrifice herself for the good of her people.

Suddenly, however, her plans were again rudely razed to the ground; for since that interview with Michael—since she had read his thoughts and had been prompted to look into her own heart, she knew that if she stretched forth her hand to save her people, her own heart would break. So now she set to work again to think it all over, and wonder what she must do.

Before she had arrived at any decision, her father came in.

Those twelve years which had come and gone had wrought a wondrous change in James Merton. His body was bent, his head snow-white, and his face was wrinkled.

"You are late, father," said Rose, putting her arm gently round his neck and kissing him. Then she turned out the steaming potatoes, and the two sat down and began to eat.

"Father," said Rose, presently.

"Well, Rose?"

"I think I've got some good work coming. Miss Kathleen was telling me to-day that Mrs Gregory wanted a seamstress, and that she had recommended me."

The man raised his head, and glared at her like a wild beast.

"Mrs Gregory!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, in troth."

"Then you won't go—do you hear me, Rose, you won't go!"

"Not go!" said Rose, in astonishment; "why not, father?"

"Because I say so!" returned the man fiercely. "Her clothes may rot before my daughter saves them!"

To this the girl said nothing. She rose and began to quietly put away the things, and as she did so, the tears ran slowly down her cheeks. Her father saw them; he put out his hand, and said gently,—

"Rose, *machree*, come here."

She went to him; he put his arms about her—drew her gently to his breast, and with his coarse hand smoothed back her silken hair.

"Rosie," he said, "my little Rosie, you mustn't think on what I say. I'm not the man I was, darlin'. These hard times

that are coming to us kind o' stir up the old sorrow, and sometimes I think I'm livin' through it all again."

"Dear father," said Rose, as she clung to him, crying a little, and he kissed her tenderly again, as he said,—

"Rosie, I've been thinkin' o' your poor mother to-day. 'Twas through old Mr Gregory that she died. You don't remember it; you were too young, Rose, but he unroofed the house when she was dying. Sure he's dead now, and I try to forgive—but I can't forget."

Then Rose heard the story of her mother's death, and her father's wrongs. Shortly after James Merton left her to think it over alone.

Half-an-hour after her father had left the hut, Rose Merton threw a shawl over her head and went out too, carefully closing the door behind her. It was quite dark,

but she knew every inch of the ground which she had to traverse, and could have found her way blindfold.

She went straight across the bog, until she found herself standing in a sequestered part of the road. Here she paused to listen — there was no sound — then she commenced to walk slowly up and down. Presently her quick ear detected the sound of other footsteps. She drew aside; the footsteps came nearer and nearer; apparently she recognised them at last, for she came from her hiding-place and went forward.

"Rose, is it you?" asked a man's voice, in a half whisper.

And the girl tripping forward, replied,—

"Yes, sir, it is I."

The next moment she felt herself in the close embrace of the young master of Storport.

"My pretty little Rose," he said, "I'm late, infernally late; but you've no idea what trouble I've had to get away at all. But now, I *am* here, 'tis all right. Come, give me my reward."

Instead of holding up her cheek as usual for his careless kiss, Rose turned her head away, and struggled to free herself from his embrace.

"Don't, sir, if you please," she said.

"Why, what's the matter?" said the young man, astonished. "Are you angry with me for delaying so long, Rose? Come, come, be reasonable, and give me the kiss of forgiveness."

But still she struggled and resisted.

"Sir, will you let me go?" she cried; "some one is coming along the road."

"Nonsense 'tis only the wind howling. Why, Rose, how cold your little hands

feel. You're not warmly enough clad for such weather as this."

"Sure, I'm not cold," returned the girl uneasily, withdrawing her hands, as she had withdrawn her body, from his embrace. "But I — I want to speak to you."

"Want to speak to me? why, of course you do," returned the young man, with a light laugh; "and as to myself, why, I've a thousand things to say. Before I left home to-night I was in a devil of a temper. But there, I don't mean to talk about that or what caused it, for I'm quite comfortable now. Rose, take my arm."

"In troth, sir, I'd rather walk alone."

"Take my arm; I insist!"

"No, sir, 'tis not right. You're a gentleman, and I'm but a poor girl. We must never meet again."

"Hullo!" he echoed, in amazement.

"It's true, sir," persisted the girl. "I came here to-night to tell you that same."

"Rubbish!" returned the young man carelessly. "You came here to-night, you little witch, to give me a few kisses, as you've often done before. Certainly I'm a gentleman, as you say, and you're not a fine lady; but for all that I love you, and I mean to indulge my whim. Poor! There's nothing money can buy which you shall not have,—fine dresses, carriages, servants to wait upon you. And when you are clothed as your beauty deserves, show me the lady who'll look half as handsome as my little Rose!"

Again he attempted to embrace her; again the girl put up her hand to keep him away.

"Oh, sir, don't talk like that," she cried pleadingly; "it was words like them

that first made me listen to you, and do all the harm I've done. I thought—God forgive me—'twould be nice to be a fine lady, for then I could help my father, and some of the poor creatures here; but now, I know I couldn't do it; it would break my father's heart."

"Your father! what's he been saying—have you told him?"

"In troth, sir, I have not. But to-day he was tellin' something to me. Sir, Mr Gregory—it was your father that unroofed our hut, and left my mother to die of cold."

The young man paused for a moment before he replied.

"Yes," he said, "I believe he did; it wasn't a pleasant thing to do; but whether or not, I don't see how that is to affect us. You can't blame me for what my father did. If every man was made

answerable for the sins of his relations, heaven knows how the world would get on."

"No, sir, I'm not blaming you; I'm only telling you that I can never meet you again, because it would break my father's heart. Now, sir, if you please, good-night. Let me go home."

"No," said the young man firmly, "you sha'n't go—not at least till you've promised to meet me again."

"I can't promise, sir. In troth, I mustn't come—my mind's made up."

"Absurd! you know I love you."

"Indeed, sir," returned the girl sadly, "I'm very, very sorry. I humbly beg your pardon for making you think that I liked you; but when you are with your own friends you'll soon forget me. Good-night."

He rushed towards her with outstretched

arms, and some passionate words upon his lips; when he was startled by heavy footsteps on the road. He paused for a moment. During that moment Rose passed into the darkness, and disappeared.

IV.

While Rose Merton had been having her interview with the young master of Storport, the young man himself was receiving his sentence of death. In a large underground kitchen, in the house of the widow Timlin, about half-a-dozen men were seated—wild, worn-out, ragged-looking creatures, who gazed at each other in strange intensity, and talked in low, deep tones. They were all tenants on the Storport estate—James Merton, and Conolly Magrath being amongst the number—while in the kitchen was the widow

Timlin herself, a phlegmatic spectator of all that was taking place. The men crowded close together—showing, in the dimly-lighted chamber, faces of ghastly pallor—for the time being all their eyes were turned upon one member of the band; the very man who had been sent as an emissary to Mr Gregory, and who had succeeded in putting that young gentleman into such a temper before he went to meet Rose. Slowly and methodically the man told his tale.

"Well boys," he said, "I went up to the Castle, and I saw the mashter hisself. I told him the truth. I asked him, for the love of God, to take down the rents a bit, because we were all shtarvin'. He was just about leavin' the house, so he kicked me out o' his road as though I'd been a dog—tould me to go to the agent, and tried to get away. But I

didn't let him go. I laid hould on him, and he had to listen."

The man paused a moment, for he was trembling excessively, and though his manner was stolid, he was evidently much excited. Mrs Timlin, who had been smoking her pipe in a corner, came forward, poured out a glass of whisky, and pushed it towards him.

"Drink it off, Toney," she said, "and let us hear all that the black-hearted rascal had to say."

The man took her advice, and went on.

"He warn't over pleased at bein' held, Mrs Timlin," said he to the widow, who fixed her black eyes upon him, and nodded her wild head to encourage him. "And when I told him that we was all shtarvin',"—he said, so much the better for himself, it was only clearing his estate of so many vagabonds that

was bringin' it lower and lower every year."

A groan went through the company, and Mrs Timlin's face looked positively gorgon-like.

"Bad cess to his black heart!" said she; "go on, Toney."

"I tould him we'd all prayed to the agent in vain, and that now, speakin' for all of us, I went to him. I begged him for the love of Almighty God to come and see for himself if my tale was true. Boys, he struck me, and kicked me as if I had been a brute baste, and when I staggered back almost blinded wid his blow, he laughed, and walked away! 'You'll starve quietly in future, my friend,' said he; 'and when you're all over seas — which would be the best place for you — perhaps I shall get a little peace on my estate.'"

There was a moment of dead silence; then a murmur ran round the room. Before any definite words were spoken, James Merton rose,—

"Boys," he said, "*I* want to say a few words to you now. You all remember, five years ago, you wanted me to be the man to put a bullet through the young masther's head; and when I said 'No,' you thought me a coward, because you knew I'd good cause to hate the very name of Gregory. Well, so I had, God knows, and so I have got now. They've treated me worse nor the brute bastes o' the field; and if I'd done right by myself, I should ha' turned my back on the lot o' them, and gone straight away to Amerikey the day I laid my poor wife in the ground. I tried to do it, but I couldn't; I just went to the mashter, and begged him

to take me back. What did he say? Though he knew that my poor wife had died for lack o' food, and because he knew it would break my heart to lave the only bit o' land that I loved in the world,—he said, 'Yes, take your hut and land, James Merton; but you'll pay the old rent!' Well, I was eager to get the bit o' land, so I said, 'Yes.' I took it, and from that day till the day he died I paid him the rent; though God alone knows what I've gone through to do it. That night he died, I thanked Almighty God. Then you came to me, and proposed that I should send the young mashter along wid him; but I said 'No,'—I'd got a daughter of my own, and I thought of his poor mother, and I couldn't bring my hand to strike at an innocent man. I said to myself, 'Sure he can't help what his father did;

maybe he's got a heart, and will make amends.' I waited, and I soon found I was wrong—he was worse than his father; and when I looked every day on my miserable neighbours, my heart bled. You thought old James Merton was a coward; you thought he hadn't a heart for ye; but I'll tell ye what he did—he went up boldly, and spoke to the young mashter, and he got—just what Toney got to-day—sent out o' the house as if he had been a dog. So now I see what it's goin' to be—starvation and misery; and I say, 'Death to the tyrant wid the black heart that is sending us all to the grave!'"

Amidst a low murmur of approval, Merton paused; a good deal of lively discussion followed; at the end of it Mrs Timlin, who had been busily at work in a corner of the room, came forward

with a little box which she placed in the middle of the table. Every man present knew what that meant. Before dipping their hands into the box, they paused in strange hesitation. Mrs Timlin bared her brown wrist, and without waiting for the others, thrust her hand into the box.

"I mane to have the first pull," she said, "plase God, I get the lucky number."

Amidst a silence which was almost death-like, she drew forth her hand again; this time her fingers were closed over a slip of paper. The box was handed round; each man drew his piece forth, then the box was placed on one side, and the men showed their numbers. A piece of paper marked with a black cross had passed into the hand of James Merton.

The man started, and as his eye rested upon the mark, his cheek grew ashen grey.

But he quickly pulled himself together and shook the hands of his comrades, one and all, and by that token he accepted the solemn trust which he knew he must fulfil.

V.

During the fortnight which followed that eventful night, there was little peace and no happiness beneath James Merton's roof. He drank much whisky; he took scarcely any food; he looked the very ghost of what he once had been, and when his daughter spoke of this and tried to learn the cause, he turned upon her and fiercely bade her be at peace. If James Merton had been less occupied with what he himself had planned to do, he would have noticed the change that was taking place in Rose. Since that night when she had said her last farewell

to Mr Gregory she had never beheld him, but she knew that things in the village were growing worse and worse, and she wondered if she herself was the cause. The agent was harder than ever on the tenants, and he acted, he said, under Mr Gregory's express commands.

Whole families were evicted; others were cast into prison, and some after having their houses razed to the ground before their eyes, had actually starved upon the roadside. The people said nothing, but one morning young Mr Gregory was astonished to receive his sentence of death. The young gentleman turned pale for a moment, and, when a little later his agent came up for orders, he handed him the paper.

"Say nothing to my mother," he said, "or she'll worry herself unnecessarily. Of course I shall send for a guard of

police for the Castle, and I shall order one to follow me wherever I go, so I shall be all right. It must be your task to see that these ruffians suffer for having dared to send me this."

So the agent went off to obey his master, while the young master, with characteristic recklessness, began to think once more of Rose Merton.

Since that night when she had bade him farewell, he had done little else but think of her. Indeed, he was devising all sorts of means to obtain his end. He had even planned a false marriage, and subsequent desertion, when his difficulties were suddenly solved by Rose herself. She sent to him and begged for another meeting. The young man smiled; having got exactly what he had been longing for, he ceased to attach so much value to it; he only thought that since she had

been the one to give in, his task would be the easier.

At the time and place which she mentioned, he went to meet her, followed by the constable, his bodyguard. He found her waiting, obedient, respectful, and prettier than ever. But when he came nearer, he saw that she was pale and sad-looking, and he attributed this change to sorrow for himself.

He went up to her and took her hands, and before she could say a word or do anything to resist him, he had thrown his arms about her and kissed her fondly. Rose disengaged herself from his embrace.

"Sir,—Mr Gregory," she said "sure, it wasn't for that I came here to-night. I wanted to speak to ye me own self about the poor creatures in the village."

The young man frowned, and angrily bit his lip.

"A deal of love you must have for me, Rose," he said, "if you come to plead their cause. Do you know they have threatened to shoot me?"

"Yes, sir, sure, I know that same."

"And you've come to say they'll do it if I don't give in, I suppose; well, let me tell you, my darling, I don't mean to give in. And as for the threat sent to me, I have instructed my agent to see that every man in the village is made to suffer for it."

"Sir, you haven't done that!"

"I have, and I hope he'll carry out my orders."

"Oh, sir, you surely haven't the heart to do a thing like that. Sure, they're harmless enough, and they don't want to harm you—all they want is to save their wives and little children, who are just starvin' for lack o' bread."

"Let them starve! Rose, listen to me. I want to speak to you. Have you reconsidered your last decision—you know I love you, Rose, and would willingly share my home with you?"

"Oh, sir," cried the poor girl, "I—I cannot."

"Rose, don't say that—remember I'm not a man to be thwarted—and it would be better for you to keep me your friend than make an enemy of me. Rose, would you still say 'No' if I offered even to make you my wife?"

He was thinking of that false marriage which he had planned, but of course Rose knew nothing of this, and he expected her face to be suddenly illuminated at the brilliant prospect of becoming the master's bride. To his surprise, however, Rose stared at him in amazement.

"Your wife!" she echoed; "and did

you not mean to make me your wife all along?"

"Our positions are so different," said the young man uneasily, "I thought we might have been happy enough without marriage. There, do not be angry—do not turn away—I'll marry you in defiance of all the world, I tell you, rather than give you up."

"Sir, let me go!" she cried indignantly, trying to free herself from the arms which he had thrown around her.

"No—be reasonable, Rose, hear me!"

He held her tightly to him—but she still struggled.

"I've heard enough, Mr Gregory! God forgive me for meeting you at all! But I'm warned in time. Don't hold me, sir, for I won't stay!"

"But I say you *shall* stay!" returned the young man fiercely; "who are you to fight against me, the master of Storport—since

you won't come with me willingly, you shall come unwillingly! I won't be made a fool of for nothing!"

He put his hand over her mouth to stifle a scream, and would have dragged her away; when suddenly he felt a heavy hand seize him by the collar and roughly hurl him aside: he staggered across the road: while Rose Merton, kept from falling by the same firm hand which had hurled off her assailant, looked up, and encountered the gaze of Michael Jamieson. The young fellow's face was quite composed, but his cheeks were very pale; he looked half sadly, half reproachfully at the girl, but he did not utter a word. Meanwhile Mr Gregory had recovered himself—with a face crimson with rage he came up to the pair who stood confronting each other in the road.

"Who is this fellow?" he asked roughly.

Michael Jamieson still looked at the girl.

"Rose Merton," said he, paying no attention whatever to the words of the master, "it's late for a young *colleen* to be out on the roads alone. You'd best get home!"

But the girl trembling violently put up her hands in supplication.

"Oh, Michael," she cried, "don't be angry!"

"I'm not angry," he returned quietly; "but do you go home!"

"That she shall *not!*" burst in young Gregory; "who are you that order her—what's *your* right over her?"

"The right of an honest man, that won't see her put upon by a villain!"

"Fair words, you rascal—"

"I've found out," continued the young fellow, preserving that *sang froid* which gave him a wonderful advantage over his opponent, "never mind how, that you've been paying your court to Rose Merton;

and when I happened to see the two o' you come together to-night, I thought I'd watch; for I'm her friend, and her father's friend, and I mane to see she comes to no harm. Rose," he continued, turning again to the girl, who still stood pale and tremulous before him, "go you home, and leave me to speak wid this man alone!"

But the girl again put out her hand towards him.

"Michael," she said, "sure I can't leave you here after me; come with me too!"

"Whoever you are," burst in young Gregory again, "you shall not stand between her and me. No one shall; confound you, man, stand aside, or I'll make you!"

"I won't shtir; that's your road, sir, this is hers!"

"Then take that!"

He lifted the cane which he held in his hand, and struck him across the face. Rose screamed. Michael struck the cane from his master's hand, and they closed in a fierce

embrace! By this time the policeman, who was ever on the track of the young man, and who had consequently been a witness of all that had taken place, thought it about time that he should interfere. He came forward, and pulled the men asunder.

"Hullo!" he said, "what's all this?"

"This ruffian has assaulted me!" cried Gregory.

"Are you hurt, sir?"

"No, not in the least."

The man laid his hand on Michael's shoulder.

"Shall I lock him up, yer honor?" he asked.

But Rose Merton suddenly stepped forward, and almost threw herself at the master's feet.

"Mr Gregory," she cried, "no! no!"

He hesitated for a moment, then he replied,—

"No, you may let him go! I struck him first, and, after all, I've got it in my power to punish him in my own fashion. You

scoundrel," he added, turning to Michael, "Rose shall fare no better for your insolent interference, I promise you! Good-night, Rose."

He kissed the tips of his fingers, and walked off, while Michael, struggling in the arms of the policeman, cried,—

"The black-hearted villain; if he dares to look at Rose Merton again, before God, I'll have his life!"

"Keep still," said the man, holding him firmly; "and as for you, my girl" (turning to Rose), "you'd best be off; sure, you've caused trouble enough already."

"Michael," asked the girl humbly, "shall I go?"

"Yes, go."

"Then—then, good-night, Michael."

"Good-night."

She lingered for a moment, half hoping he would say more, but he did not, so she accepted her punishment, and walked quietly away; but once she was out of sight and

hearing, she sat down upon the road-side and cried bitterly.

Michael tried to take the road which Mr Gregory had taken before him, but the policeman stopped him.

"Come, not that way!" he said.

"Don't be afraid, I'm cool now!"

"All the better for you; but all the same, you'd best get home and sleep it over."

. . . . . .

During the few days that followed, Rose Merton neither saw nor heard anything of her lover. She went to her work every day, but when she returned at night there was no sign of him upon the road; nor did he come to the hut, as had been his custom, to spend a few of the evening hours with her. It was evident he had not forgiven her, she thought, and so she sat at home, watching and waiting—the picture of misery and despair.

But Rose was wrong. Michael loved her

too well to hold out against her; but he had other things to occupy his mind, for, true to his promise, young Gregory was punishing him in his own fashion. The very day following the attack on Mr Gregory, Michael Jamieson had been served with a summons for rent, which was only just due, together with an intimation that from that day forth his rent would be raised, which was equal to a notice of ejectment. He had received them both without a word of protest, but he began at once to think what he must do. He had not much time to lose, since he was to answer both at the sessions, which were regularly held on the day of the monthly fair at Gulranny.

VI.

The Gulranny Fair, which was held on the first day of October 18—, was destined to be a day made memorable to every

tenant of Storport. From dawn the little village was astir, for nearly all the inhabitants had to journey to the town, to drive in their remaining live stock for sale, and answer the summonses which had been served upon them. Gulranny lay some ten Irish miles from Storport, therefore the foot passengers had to start early, in order to be there to meet the agent before the opening of the court. It was quite nine o'clock, however, when my cousin Kate, standing at the Lodge door, saw the agent drive along, attended by his escort of police, and take the Gulranny road, and about half-an-hour later Kate was called to the door again, she said, by one of the girls, to see the grand car and pair of horses, running tandem, which young Mr Gregory was driving into Gulranny. His mother was seated with him on the car, as well as a man-servant, and a policeman in plain clothes. For though, since the receipt of the warning, no attack had

been made upon young Gregory's life, he deemed it prudent to keep his bodyguard in case of danger.

"During that morning," continued Kate as she told me the story, "I had to make a few calls upon my patients. I was struck by the strange silence and deserted look of the village, and a sort of terror crept over me; a kind of foreboding, I think, of what was to take place. After I had paid my visits, I took a walk round the village, and noticed the ruins of one or two huts which Mr Gregory had recently had pulled to the ground. Upon the ruins of one sat an old man of ninety, staring stupidly about, as if stunned by the blow which had befallen him. Upon questioning him, I discovered that his hut had been converted into a ruin two days before; that he was penniless, homeless, and friendless; and that he had nothing to eat but the few potatoes which the neighbours had given him. I went to a hut and arranged that he should

be taken in and fed; then I walked on to the hovel which was inhabited by James Merton and his daughter Rose. I found that Merton had gone to the fair, but Rose was at home. The wretched room was clean and neat as usual, and Rose was seated on the bed mending her father's rags. She looked sadly pale and worn, and when I questioned her as to the cause of her trouble she only cried, and said that it was nothing. I asked her to come up to the Lodge and spend the day with our servants, but she refused; so at last, reluctantly enough, I got up to go, and left her to pass the rest of the day alone."

Meanwhile what was going on at the fair? Among the foot passengers to Gulranny that morning had been James Merton and Michael Jamieson. Michael, knowing that Merton had to answer a summons, had called for him, and proposed that the two should walk into town together. During

that minute he had been at the hut he had seen Rose, and the sight of the girl's pale cheeks and wistful eyes made him feel bitterer than ever against the man who had come between them.

They had plenty of company on the road, but when they got into the town they found the crowd immense. The little streets were thronged with men and women, who were driving in their last remaining live stock to be sold for the rent. A little before noon young Gregory drove in his tandem, scattering the ragged crowd about him like so much mud. He drove up to the door of the principal inn, and alighted. He took his mother to a private room, and went himself to the one where the agent sat. He did not go before he was wanted. The miserable tenants, dreading a court of law almost as much as they dreaded the workhouse, had been driven to make one last appeal. They had sought out the agent—laid their cases before him,

and begged him to take half of their debt, and he, having one grain of humanity in him, had promised to lay their cases before his master. He did so, and the master's answer was,—"No, they'll pay up, or go! I'll have my land, or the money for the land, if they die for it!"

When the answer was given, James Merton stood amongst the crowd. He looked at the upturned faces of the people—he heard their low murmur of heartrending despair; he saw a few scalding tears blind many eyes, and as he was about to turn and walk away, he heard these words whispered into his ear,—

"Remember, James Merton, *you're* the man."

During that day, young Gregory strolled aimlessly about the town, while his mother was doing her shopping. He was about to return to the inn to rejoin her at lunch, when, in passing across a deserted square, he came face to face with Merton. He

paused, for something in the man's face attracted him, then, without a word, he was about to pass on. But Merton stopped him.

"Yer honor," he said, respectfully touching his forelock, "I want one word wid you."

"Who are you?" returned the young man superciliously. "I think I know your face."

"I'm James Merton, yer honor."

Gregory started.

"Rose's father," he thought, "but for all that a dangerous ruffian, if what I hear be true.—Well," he added aloud, "what do you want with me?"

"I've come to speak to you, sir, on behalf o' the tenants."

The young man shrugged his shoulders impatiently.

"My friend," he said, "I've heard so much of that subject lately that it is beginning to get rather uninteresting to me. Besides, this is neither the time nor the place to discuss it. Stand aside!"

But the man doggedly kept his place.

"Only one word, sir. I humbly ask one word," he said. "We're starvin'—man, woman, and child."

"And serve you right! you won't go."

"No, sir, we won't go!" cried the man, his face for a moment lighting up into positive fury. "We can't be turned out like brute beasts to die in a foreign land. We were born here, Mr Gregory, and all we ask is to be allowed to live and die here, on the bit o' land we love. You're rich, sir, and we're poor, and we ask you to take down the rents that we may have food. It's not for ourselves we ask it, but for the wives and little children that are dying wid want and cold. There be other mashters in the county that would give in if you would give in, but I know you are among them that hould out the hardest."

"Yes," said the young man quietly, "you are right. Had I my will, there

would be no concessions in the country. I'd *starve* you into good behaviour!"

"We're starved already, sir; be merciful. *It would be better for you!*"

"What do you mean?" said the young man, turning nervously upon him.

"Only this; our blood's up, and there's no knowing what we might do if you went too far! We are desperate men."

"Desperate fools! If the law allowed it, I'd have you *whipped* into good behaviour?"

"You would?"

"I would. Good-day."

He turned, and would have moved on, but Merton clutched him fiercely.

"Stop,' he cried, "I've not done wid you yet."

"What!"

"You'd better listen; you'd better hear me out, Mr Gregory. Once more I say it would be better for *you!*"

"Do you dare to threaten?"

"And if I do? I'm not one to threaten what I'm afraid to do."

The young man turned fiercely upon him, but for some reason he suddenly changed.

"My good man," he said, "I must request you to master your temper, or it will certainly get you into trouble before long. And now, in return for your lecture, let me give you one bit of advice. If you really want some concession from me, ask *your daughter* to plead your cause."

"My daughter!" exclaimed Merton, staring wildly at the speaker; "what d'ye mean?"

"Just what I say. There, I've heard enough of your whining; but, if you really want concession, send pretty little Rose to me—and—we shall see!"

This time he did walk away quietly, puffing his cigar as he went, while Merton, who had been powerless to put out a hand to detain him, watched him with wild and wondering eyes.

"What did he mane?" he murmured, gazing at the spot where the young master's form had disappeared. "Why did he talk like that o' my Rose, wid that look in his eyes, and that wicked smile on his face? I know, God help me! His father killed her poor mother, and now he'd do worse to the child she left behind. Cold-blooded, pitiless cur! why should he live to break more hearts? He's spoken his own death-warrant, this day!"

. . . . . .

Early in the afternoon the handsome car belonging to Mr Gregory was driven round to the door of the inn. Mrs Gregory—a tall, aristocratic-looking woman of sixty, was somewhat astonished at this early departure, but when she heard that her son wished for it, she said no more. She was by no means an estimable old woman,—she was heartless and cruel enough to the world in general,—and she had never been kindly enough to question the cruelties which she

knew were regularly practised on her son's estate; but she adored her son, indeed it was said he was the only thing she had ever been known to care for.

When, therefore, he gave his orders, she never questioned them; and, though she would fain have stayed a few hours longer in Gulranny that day, she said nothing, but, when the car was ready, she quietly and proudly took her seat by her son's side.

In truth, Mr Gregory had deemed it advisable to make an early departure from Gulranny that day; for, since his interview with James Merton, and his subsequent sight of the faces of certain of his tenantry, he by no means looked forward with pleasure to the prospect of a dark drive home. But he said nothing to his mother,—it was also the fear of frightening her which made him neglect to provide himself with an extra escort of police.

Thus they drove out of Gulranny before the day's proceedings were nearly over, and

certainly before the daylight had even commenced to fade.

. . . . .

About seven o'clock that night James Merton, a very weary, worn-out man, walked quietly into Storport. He was astonished to find unusual commotion going on in the village,—certain figures ran hither and thither, others stood in little groups about the road,—while around the house of the landlord gathered a great crowd. There was certainly something the matter, and, before going to his hut, though he was sorely worn out, Merton walked on to discover the cause of the commotion. He had made one or two inquiries, and had learned the fact that the young master was shot—when he came face to face with my cousin Kathleen. On hearing the news, she had hastened down to the Castle to see if she could do anything for Mrs Gregory—she was now about to return home.

"This is a shocking affair!" said Kathleen, in answer to Merton's "good day."

"They tell me the young mashter's *dead!*" returned the man, looking quietly at her; "is that *true*, Miss Kathleen?"

"Quite true," returned Kate; "he was shot this afternoon as he was driving home from the fair!"

"Was he shot *dead*, miss—or did he spake before he died?"

In recalling this conversation afterwards, Kathleen remembered the peculiar, half-trembling eagerness of the man's manner—at the time she was too much excited to notice it at all.

"No, he did not speak," said Kathleen; "he was shot through the head, and he fell dead upon his mother's shoulder. Think of that! I wonder she didn't faint or die with the shock—but she just clasped her arms around the body—and kept it so while her frightened groom drove the horses on to the Castle!"

"But, Miss Kathleen—the man that done it—didn't they try to catch the one that fired the shot?"

"Yes, of course they did," returned Kathleen, "and he is very likely in custody by this time. You see, when the shot was fired, the horses took fright and bolted—but, as soon as they could be pulled up, the officer who was on the car leapt down and pursued the murderer. I hope it isn't a Storport boy!"

"Miss Kathleen," said Merton quietly, "young Mr Gregory was a pitiless man."

"I am afraid he was."

"Then, maybe, afther all, perhaps 'tis better that he should be sent away!"

"Don't say that, James Merton. Look at it whatever way we will, this murder of the young man was a cruel and shameful act. Think of his poor mother,—whatever he was, she loved him, quite as fondly as you love your Rose,—and to have him shot dead at her side—to have his warm blood

scattered over her body—to see him happy and bright one minute, and the next a hideous corpse. No, look at it what way we will, there is nothing can justify *that!*"

"No," said Merton, looking at her with a strange, wild light in his eyes; "that's what they all say when the poor down-trodden creature puts out a hand to strike the tyrant that has been torturing poor souls for years! Say she does suffer—isn't there others that suffer too? Hasn't the poor man got a heart the same as the rich to feel for his kith and kin. I tell you, Miss Kathleen, she's a pitiless woman, just as he was a pitiless man. What did she care for the cries o' the starving creatures about her, so long as her son was safe, and knew nought o' sorrow or pain; and now the pitiful cry is all for her, not for the poor creature who has been starved and tortured into doin' what he's done."

He turned and walked away; pushing

his way through the crowd, and looking neither to the right nor to the left, until he gained his hut. He found the place empty and in darkness. He lit a rush-light which was fixed in a bottle standing on the table; then he sat down on a form, and covered his face with his hands. He was trembling all over by this time — not with cold, but with some inward sinking of the heart. He fancied he could hear the low moans of a suffering woman. . . . The sound of a footstep coming across the threshold made him raise his head. Looking up, he encountered the eyes of his daughter Rose. . . . She was pale as a corpse . . . she was trembling violently,—with a low moan she tottered across the room, and fell at her father's feet.

"What is it, Rose?" he asked, almost roughly; "are *you*, too, coming to ask me to pity the tyrant that's been sent to his last account?"

The girl raised her head and stared into her father's face with mingled terror and pain.

"Father," she said, "don't you know who *done* it?"

The man started, and almost pushed her away.

"How should I know?" he said.

"O God, help me!" cried the girl, with a fresh outburst of grief. "Father, it—it was Michael Jamieson—him that I love so well."

VII.

Yes, it seemed all too true. On the evidence of a gun found on the very spot where the murder was committed, Michael Jamieson had been seized and handcuffed as he had been quietly walking home from Gulranny Fair; and Rose Merton, standing on the lonely Storport bog, had seen her lover dragged past her on his

way to prison. The poor girl, utterly beside herself with terror and pain, had shrieked out, and rushed towards him; but she was roughly hurled back. Michael Jamieson, they told her, was going to be tried for murder—for the murder of the master of Storport.

This was the story which Rose sobbed forth, kneeling at her father's knee; and as James Merton heard, he became like one stricken unto death. A fortnight before he had, with the money supplied to him by Mrs Timlin, purchased that gun from Michael, and since then—until that very day—it had been kept secretly hidden at the inn. After the fatal shot had been fired, Merton, eager for self-preservation, had fled, and forgotten the gun, which he left lying on the ground.

He had been quite ignorant of the fact that Michael's initials were engraven on the stock. But this fact had been quite enough to implicate Michael,

and, despite his firm protestations of innocence, he was detained a prisoner. It was a trying time for Rose Merton, for somehow or other it got whispered about that *she* was the cause of the affair. Everybody knew that Michael was not mixed up with the Ribbon boys, and now that things had gone so far, the policeman who had been young Gregory's constant escort, told of the meeting he had witnessed between Rose and the young master—of Michael's interference—of the quarrel—and of Michael's threat to take the young master's life. So these things got whispered about, and soon Rose Merton found she could not even cross her threshold in peace.

Two days had passed, and Michael still lay a closely-guarded prisoner in the barracks. Rose had made one or two attempts to see him, but had been decidedly refused.

Meanwhile things were going forward

at the Castle. The inquest had been held, and at last, with much pomp, the body of the young master was conveyed to the family grave. Nearly all the tenantry had turned out to watch the grand hearse and coaches go by — but Merton sat at home. He was looking with heavy eyes into the fire, thinking —not of the murdered, but of the living —of Michael Jamieson, whom he well knew was to be tried for a deed which he had never done.

"They'll never hang him," he muttered; "no, no; there's no evidence against him, and he'll come out a free man. If I didn't know that I think I should give myself up and tell all; but no, they'll never take Michael's life. I've enough blood on my soul already—enough without poor Michael's. I can't take bite or sup, and at night I can't sleep for thinkin' o' what I've done!"

He shivered all over; he covered his face with his hands and moaned. All was quiet

in the cabin; but he could hear the faint echo of the murmuring crowd without, and he knew that the murdered body of the young master was being taken to its last home. White and wild, shaking now from head to foot, he rose, staggered across the kitchen, and shut the door. But the sounds still crept in, and above the keening of the crowd he seemed to hear the mother sobbing. With a cry he staggered back, and fell once more into his seat.

"O God, why did I do it?" he moaned. "I might ha' known the deed would curse me and drag me down! Sometimes I feel a kind o' yearnin' come upon me to go and give myself up and end it all—but I can't —I daren't—for Rose's sake; yes, and for the sake o' that other Rose who gave her to me wid her dyin' breath. Oh wife, wife! you were like an angel on this dark earth; and now maybe you're somewhere up yonder among the good folk in heaven,

mournin' and grievin' over the deed your man has done!"

His body was shaken now with sobs and tears; he covered his face again, and sat crying like a little child. While he sat thus the door was gently opened, and Rose came in. She had been crying too, for she had been standing alone on a desolate part of the bog watching the funeral procession as it made its way through the village, and she had been stricken to the heart, believing, as she did, that she was partly the cause of the murder. So she had covered her ears as if to shut out that low moan which haunted her, and had walked sadly home. She had pushed back the door so gently that her father had not heard. Noting his troubled attitude, she went sympathetically forward and laid her hand gently upon his shoulder.

"Father!"

"Eh! what's that?" cried Merton, starting wildly to his feet.

"It's me, father—Rose!"

"Rose! my daughter?" he echoed, staring at her; "why—why do you come on me so sudden? I did not see you."

He was trembling like an aspen leaf, and his pale face was bathed with perspiration. Rose turned quietly away.

"Father," she asked presently, "is there any news?"

"O' what?"

"Of poor Michael?"

"I don't know. Sure I've been too worried to ask. What are you cryin' for? Give me my dinner."

"Yes, father."

She crossed quietly to a square wooden chest, lifted the lid, and took out their dinner,—a few cold potatoes and a bowl of milk, and set it on the table; then she took her seat in a corner of the room out of her father's sight. For, despite her efforts to suppress her grief, her tears still flowed fast, and her throat was convulsed with sobs.

"Rose."

"Yes, father."

"Is there any drink in the house?"

The girl sadly shook her head. Where was the money to come from, she asked herself, when she could not even buy bread.

"Then go and fetch some," he answered roughly. "No, stay, I'll step down to Widdy Timlin's myself. Rose," he added softly, extending his hand towards her, "Rosie, *machree*, don't take on so. It breaks my heart to see you. 'Twill all come right in the end."

Encouraged by her father's gentle tone, the girl came forward, and, sobbing passionately, threw herself at his feet.

"Oh, father, father," she moaned, "I can't help it! Sure, don't I know 'twill never come right till Michael's cleared!"

"They'll never dare to harm the boy!"

"Ah, father, 'tis not altogether *that* I'm

thinkin' of," returned the girl; "whatever they do to him there'll be the guilt on him, and he'll never be free o' *that!* He's shed blood, and God will never forgive him; and God will never forgive me my wicked share!"

"Maybe, afther all, he's innocent," said Merton, watching her quietly. In a moment her face was irradiated.

"Oh, if I could only believe *that!*" she cried; "but no, father, all the folk say he did it; and isn't there his own gun to *prove* that he did? He's a *murderer*, father,—think o' that!—a man all good folk hate—a thing scorned and hated by men, and outcast from God,—with no blessing in this world, and no hope in the next,—an evil thing, with Cain's mark always burning on his guilty brow!"

The girl had spoken impetuously, in a wild kind of shuddering horror; as she ceased, her father grasped her hand with a grip of iron.

"Rose!" he almost shrieked, "say no more—I can't listen—"

"What ails you, father?" said the girl in amazement.

"You're too hard on the boy. If he done it in anger or in drink, God may forgive him yet."

"Never, never!"

"It's a lie!" shrieked James Merton, roughly throwing her hands aside. "Who are you, to speak in the name of Almighty God? It turns my heart sick to hear you! Have you got no pity?"

"God knows I have," returned the girl quietly; "pity and love too; and, when I think o' poor Michael, my heart bleeds; but, father, I can't help thinking sometimes on him that's dead. It was very cruel,—he was only a boy, with all the world before him,—and the murderer's hand struck him down in his strength before he could even say a prayer!"

With a wild moan James Merton fell back half-fainting in his seat.

"Water," he moaned, "give me a glass o' water!"

"Here, father."

"Loosen my neckcloth, Rose. I'm a bit faint."

With trembling fingers she undid the kerchief which was knotted around his throat, and set his collar free. She held the water to his lips, and with her apron wiped the cold sweat from his brow, and gradually he recovered. His face was still ashen grey, his lips livid, his eyes large and wild.

"Rosie," he said tenderly, "I think I'll lie down a bit, for I'm clean tired out!"

The girl put her arms around his neck and kissed him.

"Sit down and take your dinner, father," she said.

"No, *mavourneen*, I can't eat; I'm sick

and tired—heart sick, wid all this trouble. I—I—think I'll lie down on the bed and rest a bit, Rose. Give me a kiss, *machree*."

"Yes, father."

She held up her face towards him, and he kissed it tenderly.

"Good-night, my Rose," he said.

"Dear father, good-night."

He gently released her from his arms and staggered across the floor. Having reached the door which led into his little bedchamber, he paused and looked back.

"Rose," he said, and his voice was broken, as if with suppressed tears; "Rosie, *machree*, when you were a little child, you used to fold your hands and say a pretty prayer your poor mother taught you. Do you ever pray *now?*"

"Every night, father," answered Rose.

"For—for your poor mother—and for all your friends—"

"And for *you*, father, too."

"Ah, you shall teach *me* to say it some

day, Rose—maybe 'twill make these bad times mend!"

He turned, entered his room, and left his daughter in the kitchen alone.

When he was gone, Rose quietly put away the food which he had left untasted; then she sat with folded hands before the fire.

"Poor father!" she murmured sadly, glancing towards the door of the room where he lay. "This trouble's preying sorely on *him*, and he's growing thinner and greyer each day. It makes my heart bleed to look at him, and to know how little good I am to help him now,—for I can't work; my heart's too full. Day and night I'm thinking o' poor Michael. I can't believe but he did it; he was so mad against the young master; he swore, in my own hearing, to have his life, and all on account o' me! Oh, Michael, Michael! if I only knew how to help you!—if I could only comfort you in all this trouble that's come!"

She rocked herself to and fro, giving

vent to the grief which was well-nigh killing her, but which she only suffered to master her when she was alone.

Suddenly she heard herself called.

"Rose, Rose!"

She started up. It was her father calling her from the inner room. She hurriedly dried her eyes, and ran across the floor.

"Yes, father!" she replied, crossing the threshold of the bedroom, then she paused: James Merton, fully dressed, had thrown himself wearily upon the bed, where he lay in a deep sleep. But his sleep was troubled; his breathing was laboured; now and again he muttered some words, and put up his hand, as if to shield himself from danger.

"Poor, poor father!" murmured the girl.

She went forward, bent tenderly above him, and gently smoothed back the threads of silver hair which lay cold and clammy upon his brow. At that the sleeper moved again and seized her hands.

"Rose, Rose," he cried, "don't take on so, *mavourneen*, and I'll tell ye all. *I killed the mashter*! I shot him *dead!*—do ye hear?—*dead*, wid Michael's gun!"

He moaned and turned on his pillow, but the girl did not move; she stood, as if suddenly turned to stone, gazing with horror-stricken eyes at the haggard face of her father. . . . . Presently he moved and spoke again.

"Rose," he murmured, "Rosie, *machree*, don't cry or it'll break your poor father's heart. I never meant trouble to come to you, and I thought if *he* was *dead*, we'd maybe have brighter times. So I done it—I murdered him; and now they say 'twas poor Michael as done that same, but it wasn't. Michael's a good lad. Rosie, darlin', say a prayer to-night for your poor old father."

The grasp of his fingers loosened, and Rose was free. She staggered back and almost fell. The noise awakened her father;

he started up, rubbed his eyes, and stared all round him.

"What's the matter?" he cried. "What have I said? I thought. . . . Rose, what are you there for? . . . . . Why do you look at me like *that?*"

"Father!" murmured the girl, forcing her white lips to speak, "tell me, is it—is it—*true?*"

"*True!* is what true?" returned Merton; then with a sudden impulse he extended his arms and murmured pitifully, "oh, Rose, Rose—God help me!"

His arms were still outstretched towards her, but the girl made no movement to go to him. She put up her hands as if to keep him away, and with a low moan, fell fainting upon the floor.

VIII.

No sooner was the body of the young master committed to the earth than public

attention once more turned upon the man who was generally supposed to have murdered him. Michael Jamieson still lay in the strong room at Storport barrack; for, before being sent to trial, the case was to be thoroughly investigated by the magistrates of Gulranny.

Rose Merton knew all this; she also knew how important it was that she should see Michael before his trial came on; so at last, through the friendliness of one of the policemen at the barrack, she was promised that interview with her lover which she so urgently sought.

It was the night before the day on which Michael was to be taken into Gulranny to undergo his first examination, that Rose Merton walked wearily across the bogs towards the barrack. Having reached the building, she was admitted, and shown without delay into the strong room where Michael lay.

"Ten minutes, Rose," murmured the

man who showed her in, "and then you must be off. It's against orders, you know, to let you come at all, but sure you'll never spake about it!"

"Never," said the girl solemnly, raising her heavy eyes to his face; and the man, touched to the heart by her haggard look, added hastily,—

"Sure, it's meself that's on duty, *astore*, and I'm rather deaf, so you may just say what ye like to the boy, so long as ye don't overrun yer time. Now hurry, *avich*, hurry, for I'm in dread till I get ye away again, and that's the truth."

The room was a sort of dungeon; not unlike a prison cell. It was very scant of furniture, and its one little window was secured by heavy iron bars. Michael Jamieson, who was well liked and respected by every man in the barrack, was suffered to remain here without handcuffs. When Rose entered he was seated dejectedly on the side of his bed;

at sight of her face he rose with a joyful cry and folded her in his arms.

"Rose!" he said; "my own darlin' Rose!"

He kissed her cheek again and again, and smoothed her pretty black hair; but the girl said nothing,—she just laid her head upon his breast and sobbed like a child. It was the first time she had cried since she had fainted before her father.

"Rose," murmured the young fellow, "you've come at last!"

"Yes," returned the girl, stifling her sobs, "I have come, God help me!"

"I was thinkin' you wouldn't come at all, Rose, though day and night I've sat waiting and watchin', thinkin' o' nought but Rose Merton. At every sound I heard I started up, thinking it was maybe you come at last, and when the step passed and no Rose came—I knelt down and prayed. God has heard me,—you are here!"

"Oh, Michael, do you forgive me?"

"What have I to forgive, *mavourneen?*

Nay, never hang thy head. Are you thinkin' o' him that's dead? Poor lad, as freely as I forgive him, I can forgive you."

"But, Michael, when you know all—"

"I know it already, Rose—I've spent all my time thinkin' o' it—and now I see you were not so much to blame. What was I, a poor rough lad, by the side o' the young master? What was my love to his? You thought him an honest man, *machree*, and when he spoke ye fair you trusted and believed him. He was rich—I was poor—'twas only the luck that was against us—no fault o' yours!"

"Michael, what are you saying?" exclaimed the girl in amazement.

"Nothin'! Don't mind me, Rose; thank God you've come—that's all. I'm to go before the magistrates to-morrow: the sight o' your face will help me through!"

"You're going to be tried?"

"Yes, Rose;—for murder!"

A convulsive shiver passed over the girl's

frame. She covered her eyes with her hands.

"Ah, yes!" she moaned.

"Why do you shrink away? Why do you hide your face? Rose, listen to me—you don't think that I did it? You can never think *that!* As God's my judge, I'm innocent!"

"I know it, Michael—too well!"

"Too well?"

"Ay—too well!" returned the girl in a low, despairing moan. "Michael, let me speak. Let me have it off my heart, for it seems hurrying me into my grave. I know you're innocent—and why?—because I've come straight from him as done the cruel deed!"

The young man stared at her incredulously.

"What!" he exclaimed; then he added eagerly, "speak, Rose—who is he?"

The girl grasped his arm for support, as she whispered,—

"My—my *own father!*"

"No!"

"Indeed, Michael, 'tis true!"

"*He* killed young Mr Gregory!"

"He did!"

"I can't think it, Rose—it seems too horrible for belief. Why did he do it?"

"He was one of the Ribbon boys," said the girl in a soft whisper, "and he drew the blood-marked paper, and was told off to do the job. Well, he sent the warning, and though he was mad against the young master, he kind o' shrank from taking his life. So he waited; but things got no better, and the boys urged him on. At last it was arranged that he was to do it on the day of Gulranny Fair. Still he didn't want to do it—and when he was in Gulranny he spoke to the young master and asked him to be merciful to all the poor creatures in Storport!"

"Yes, Rose, go on!"

"Well, the master was fierce with him;

said he'd starve every man; and then he said something about *me!* Father was mad; so he took plenty to drink and started for home. But he only got half way. He went to the spot where he'd hidden the gun, took it out, and lay down behind a mud bank. When the car drove up he fired, and the master fell dead! Michael, he told me all. He's just broken-hearted on account o' you. 'Twas with your gun he did it; you sold it to him a fortnight ago!"

"God help me; so I did!"

"And, Michael, this is worst of all—they've called *me* as a witness against you! Oh! what shall I say? what shall I say?"

"Speak the truth, Rose, every word!"

"The truth!" returned the girl; "and if I do, what then? You will be free; but I shall have spoken the death warrant of *my own father.*"

"That's true!" exclaimed Michael, aghast.

"Oh, Rose, why did you not come to me before?"

"I could not, Michael. When I asked to be allowed to see you they refused; and even now 'tis Hogan O'Connor that has quietly let me in."

"Let me think! let me think! Oh, *mavourneen*, this is a wicked trouble that has come upon us. . . . If they should find me guilty—but no, they can't do *that* —there be no evidence against me!"

"Oh, Michael, there's the gun!"

"The gun!" returned the young fellow dreamily.

"Sure enough, dear—'twas found on the very spot. . . . Father dropt it in his haste to get away."

"Then, 'tis black against me. Well, we must trust in God!"

"Michael, what do you mean?" said the girl, clinging wildly to him.

"Just this, *machree*, I want you to remember when you're in the witness-box

to-morrow, that 'tis easier to die with an innocent than a guilty mind. I'm young and strong and can bear a bit o' trouble, and he is *your father.* Rose, if you are brave and silent, thank God, he'll never come to harm, for there isn't another soul in the world can spake a word against him!"

"I can't bear it; it will break my heart!"

"Don't say that, darlin'; to see *you* grieve is the hardest of all to bear. Since I was a bit of a lad I've had but one thought in the world, and that thought was Rose Merton. True or false I've always loved *you!*"

"And I loved *you* Michael,—always, always!"

"I'll try to think it, Rose. I'll try to forget that aught ever came between us two. But I don't think I ever loved you as I love you *now.* It's *worth* being here; it's worth sorrow and death itself—to feel as I feel—I think I could die now, free and glad!"

"Michael," sobbed the girl, "for heaven's sake don't talk of dying!"

"I won't! I'll try to think all will come right, and maybe after all it will. Give me thy hand, Rose; look in my face and tell me, come what may, you love me now!"

"I do, I do!"

"With all your heart?"

"With all my heart."

"That's enough, that's enough," he murmured, as he folded her to his breast.

"Can you forgive me, dear?"

"Forgive you, Rose? If you could see into my heart and read all the love that's there, you'd never ask that same!"

Their interview was nearly over; they had already far exceeded their time; the policeman appeared and said, as gently as he could, that Rose Merton must go. Then the girl felt her weakness returning; she clung to her lover.

"Oh, Michael, I can't go," she sobbed hysterically; "I can't bear it; I must speak!"

But the young fellow tried his best to soothe her.

"Keep up your heart, Rose," he whispered; "I'll fight it through like a man, and take my chance. Don't think o' me, but o' your *own flesh and blood.* Remember if you spake the word that frees me, *your father's* a dead man!"

"Oh! what shall I do?"

"Trust in the Lord to make things mend. Trust in God, Rose, and pray for me."

Then he signalled to the man to take her; and poor Rose, half distracted and broken-hearted, was led away.

How she got outside she never knew. When she came fully to herself she was standing on the Storport road, within a hundred yards of the barrack.

It was a dreary-looking night. At first it seemed to her that there was no one abroad, but suddenly she became conscious of a figure walking along the road a little

before her—the figure of a woman,—tall and stately and clothed in deep black. Rose knew that figure well. It was Mrs Gregory of the Castle—yes, the once proud Mrs Gregory—old and enfeebled now, and leaning on a staff. One moment of hesitation, then Rose ran forward and clutched her dress.

"Madam," she cried in a low trembling voice, "I want to speak to you!"

The lady paused; but Rose could not see her face, it was covered with a thick crape veil.

"Whoever you are," she answered, "it is impossible. I can speak to no one!"

"One word!" cried Rose, "only one word!"

"I do not know you!"

"Oh, madam, you know me only too well!"

The lady raised her veil, and looked into the girl's troubled face. As she did so her features hardened; her eyes glittered like steel.

"*You* here!" she began passionately; "girl, do you dare?"

"Oh, madam, God forgive me for speaking to you in your trouble! I know you've cause to hate me and mine — ay, more cause than you know."

"Hate you!" returned the woman fiercely; "ay, more than hate. Had I my will you should *hang* with your wretched paramour."

"Madam, for the love of God!" exclaimed the girl, sinking on her knees.

"Your face sickens me; your voice hateful to me! Begone, or—or I shall strike you!"

She grasped her cane as if she meant to carry out the threat.

Rose Merton did not shrink; looking up quietly, she said,—

"Yes, strike me. Blows would be better for me, madam, than even kind words; but you must hear me."

"I will not!"

"I *will* speak, if you kill me for it!

Madam, my heart bleeds for you, but you can't mend one dark deed by doin' another; and it's murder you're goin' to do, in the sight o' God."

"What do you mean?"

"Just this. Michael Jamieson never harmed a hair of your son's head."

"Don't speak of it, nor of him! My curse—"

"Madam, what does the good Book say?—'Curse not at all.' I'm only a poor girl, and you're a great lady, but I'm here to save you from a wicked deed—a deed as wicked as the one you lay at Michael Jamieson's door!"

"I've heard you, Rose Merton, now hear me. You would tell me that this wretched creature was only one of many. I know it. The murder was planned by the Ribbonmen, and Jamieson was only the instrument! Silence, and listen! I tell you I care little now whether or not this man was guilty of the deed itself. Even if you could

prove his innocence, I would not spare him!"

"You would not—"

"If I had the power," she continued, growing more and more excited, "I'd hunt you all down, *you* first of all. You should all hang together!"

"Don't say *that*—'tis not spoken like a woman."

"Then I will speak like a mother—give me back my son!"

"Oh, if I could; it would not only heal your heart, but lift the load forever off mine. But I cannot! What is done is done, and all I'm here for now is to save an innocent man."

"Begone!"

"I will not go! What is your grief to mine? Do you think 'tis only gentlefolks can feel? Ah, your heart is hard, and you forget that poor folk can suffer too. If you and your son had been a little merciful, he would be alive now."

"Ah!"

"When we asked for bread, you didn't listen. When the mothers and children were dying for lack of food, you didn't heed. A thousand homes might be empty, a thousand hearts broken, and what did you care? You had neither pity nor kindness. You drove men mad, and then one poor miserable madman took your son's life!"

The woman rose her height, and pointed with her hand.

"Begone!" she said, "you waste your time and mine. I have only one wish—never to see your face again! Only one regret—that you will not suffer by the side of the wretch for whom you came to plead! . . . Rose Merton, one word more. When my son fell dead into my arms, his life-blood flowed upon my shoulder, soaking my dress with red. I looked and looked at the mark, until it almost burnt into my brain. Then, in case I should ever be inclined to feel pity, I stitched this piece

of red cloth upon my shoulder, just where the blood had been. There it will remain, ever reminding me of my duty, until my vengeance is complete."

Heart sick and soul sick, Rose raised her eyes, and saw for the first time that a large spot of red, like blood, was fixed upon the woman's shoulder. The sight of it almost made her faint, and with a sickening sense of fear upon her she turned away.

IX.

According to the arrangements which had been made beforehand, Michael Jamieson was next morning placed upon a car, and, attended by a strong escort of police, was driven to the court-house at Gulranny. The trial had excited popular interest, and nearly every Storport boy was in town that day. My uncle and Achill Murry were two of those who were to decide whether or not Michael Jamieson was to

be committed for trial. The place where the investigation was held was a large square room, and on this occasion that portion of it which was allotted to the public was crammed to suffocation, while all those who were unable to gain admittance clustered together eagerly about the doors. Among those who had been enabled to obtain seats were Charlie Bingley and his mother. Mrs Bingley, a jolly-looking woman of forty, had a special interest in the proceedings, for since her life had been threatened, not once but many times, since she had felt it her duty to prosecute some ruffians who persisted in poaching her river. My cousin Kathleen was also present; Mrs Timlin, Conolly, and, most prominent of all, Mrs Gregory, clothed in the deepest of black, and with the red mark looking like blood upon her shoulder.

After the preliminaries were gone through, Mrs Gregory was the first witness called. She stood like a woman

of stone, her features fixed, her mouth set in cruel determination. She still leant somewhat feebly upon a handsome ebony cane, but she gave her evidence in a plain, straightforward manner, and without a tremor of the voice. When she was done she took her seat in court, and continued to grimly watch the proceedings throughout the day.

Dr Maguire was the next: he had made a post-mortem examination of the body, and told the cause of death. Then came the policeman who had been on the car at the time of the murder, who had found the gun, and who had subsequently taken Michael Jamieson prisoner. He swore to the gun as the one he had found, but he confessed he had never seen it in the prisoner's possession. He simply concluded it belonged to the prisoner on account of his initials being cut upon the stock. They were *M. J.* But he had something more to say. When questioned

as to what made him connect *M. J.* with Michael Jamieson, he told of the meeting he had witnessed between the young master and Rose Merton—of Michael's interference — of the struggle — of his threat to take Mr Gregory's life.

Public interest was certainly awakened at last, and when James Merton entered the court, you could have heard a pin drop. He was haggard and worn—but he never lifted his eyes from the ground. His evidence was of little importance. He knew nothing of his daughter's meetings with the young master or of Michael's interference. He had walked with him into Gulranny on the day of the murder, but once in the town, they had parted company, and he, James Merton, had started for home alone.

"Did the prisoner refuse to accompany you back."

"No; I didn't ask him."

"Why?"

"Why?" repeated Merton; "I don't know why. I wanted to get home, and I went home."

"Did anything occur during your walk home?"

"Nothing. I walked straight across the bog. When I got to Storport I heard o' the murder."

"On the fair day, had the prisoner a gun in his possession?"

"No."

"You will swear it?"

"I will swear it."

"You know that the prisoner possessed a gun?"

"No."

"One moment. Look at this gun."

The gun which had deprived young Gregory of life was thereupon handed to James Merton. For a moment he shrank half fearfully away—fixing his eyes wildly upon it.

"What — what's this?" he exclaimed. "Why do you bring *this* to *me?*"

"I want you to look at it, and tell me if you have ever seen it before."

He looked at it long and intently—then he turned away.

"No," he said.

"You will swear that you have never seen it before?"

"Yes," he returned desperately, "I'll swear it."

"You don't know that it belongs to the prisoner?"

"No."

"You will swear you have never seen him with this gun in his hand?"

"Yes, I'll swear that too!"

Merton was ordered to step down, and now there remained but one witness to be called; his daughter Rose. She came into the court looking scarcely like a living woman. Her face was white as death, her eyes were large and lustrous, and as they gazed gently around the court they had in them a strange, wild,

wandering look, as if she did not understand what was taking place; and, indeed, she scarcely saw. She was conscious only of a wild mass of people, in the midst of which sat a figure robed in black, with a blood-red mark upon the shoulder. She felt that the pale face was turned towards her, and that the pitiless eyes were fixed upon her as if to read her very soul. She passed her hand across her eyes, then fixed them upon the ground.

"Your name is Rose Merton."

"It is, sir."

"Look at the prisoner; do you know him?"

She raised her head and looked steadily over at Michael, who stood pale, resolute, but handcuffed. As their eyes met, her own filled with tears.

"Do you know him?"

"I do, sir."

"You were, I believe, engaged to be married to him."

"I was, sir."

"But like many another of your sex, you preferred the attentions of a gentleman. You also knew the deceased?"

Rose did not answer. Her pale cheek had flushed now, and her tears fell fast.

"Come, answer my question!" said the magistrate sharply; whereat she quietly wiped away her tears and replied,—

"Yes, sir; I knew young Mr Gregory."

"Intimately? I believe he was a lover of yours?"

"Oh no, no; not that!"

"What! were you not in the habit of meeting him?"

"Yes—we—we met once or twice."

"You were in his company on the night of the 16th, I believe?"

"Yes, sir, I was. I went to tell Mr Gregory I could not meet him any more, because—"

"During that meeting, what occurred?—did the prisoner appear and remonstrate against your conduct?"

"Yes, sir, Michael came up and threw off young Mr Gregory, who was dragging me away."

"And there was a struggle between deceased and the prisoner?"

"They had words, sir."

"And from words they came to blows?"

"Yes, sir," replied the girl, trembling violently; "but—it was all my fault; I was to blame!"

"Never mind that, but answer me, on your oath, did you hear the prisoner threaten to take deceased's life?"

The girl looked up in terror; again she put her hand to her head as if to collect her wandering thoughts.

"Oh, sir," she cried piteously, "it was only a few words in anger, he meant no harm."

"Did he, or did he not, use this expression, '*I'll have his life?*'"

"Oh, sir, don't ask me—I—I—don't know!"

A little more questioning, and Rose

Merton, half fainting and wholly distracted, was forcibly removed from the court. Everybody present believed that she had wilfully lied to save her lover's life. The case was now left in the hands of the jury. The magistrate summed up, and the jury returned a verdict of "Not Guilty." So Michael was set at liberty, though there were few in court that day, including the jury who refused to convict him, but believed that Michael had been very intimately mixed up with the murder, if he did not actually commit it.

X.

"It is nearly six years ago now," said Kathleen, "since that night when poor Michael Jamieson came back with the taint of the prison upon him, and yet I remember it as well as if it were yesterday. He had always been a favourite in Storport, and the news of his release excited

the people almost to madness: bonfires were lit on the hills, and the villagers turned out in a perfect crowd to welcome him home. Michael himself came back quietly enough, with Rose Merton and her father—he refused to join in the merry-making, but while the shouts of joy were ringing through the village, he sat beside the fire in James Merton's hut holding Rose's hand. The girl was pale and trembling like a leaf; she had her head turned away from him, and she was crying,—

"I can't, Michael, I can't," she said; "don't ask me to do it—I've brought you harm enough, God knows."

"Rose, don't say that," returned the young fellow earnestly; "or if you *will* say it—add that, after all the sorrow and pain, you mean to give me a little happiness by becoming my wife!"

He drew her towards him and kissed her fondly, and she sobbed out her sorrow upon his shoulder.

"Ah, Michael," she cried, "you forget —my—my father!"

"No, *mavourneen*, I don't forget—but that makes no difference to me."

Just a week later, Rose and Michael became man and wife; they were married quietly by Father John. Some of the girls were in the little chapel to witness the ceremony, for Rose had always been an immense favourite at the Lodge, and they would have got up some wedding festivities, but Rose said no—she shrank from any publicity; all she wanted, she said, was to make Michael happy. So she, the prettiest and showiest girl in Storport, was disposed of, and everybody thought that the tragedy had come to a satisfactory close.

. . . . . .

As soon as popular excitement had somewhat subsided, the inhabitants of Storport again turned their thoughts to the question of landlord and tenant. Everyone looked

for a new landlord in Storport, for at the death of young Gregory the estates passed into the possession of a distant cousin. As soon, therefore, as he chose to make his appearance in Storport, Mrs Gregory would have to vacate the Castle and take up her residence in a little white-washed cottage which faced the Storport high road, and which had been used for a similar purpose before.

The people looked forward to the change in anxiety, hoping against hope for better times to come. But the news soon spread that no change was likely to take place, at least for some time. The new landlord was in India—he intended to remain there for many months longer, and in the meantime he left his aunt in full possession of the estates.

If things had been bad under the young man's management, they grew infinitely worse under the management of his mother, for she, believing she had been

tricked of her vengeance, looked upon each of her miserable tenants as the murderer of her son. She stalked over the black bogs, with her face set in rigid determination. She was for ever habited in the deadliest of black; and she wore that sickening spot of red on her shoulder.

Her first act was to evict Michael Jamieson; and he, knowing the terrible secret, quietly submitted to his fate. He removed to a croft on a neighbouring estate; then she raised the rent of every holding, and sent many a man, woman, and child, to an early grave.

It must not be supposed that this kind of thing was allowed to go unchecked — a species of civil war commenced, with grim determination on either side to fight it through. Periodical meetings were held in Mrs Timlin's kitchen — new agents came and went, terrified by the threats which rained

around them. At last, Mrs Gregory determined to face the storm alone.

It was on the night of the departure of the last agent that another meeting was held in Mrs Timlin's kitchen, and the men, looking into each other's faces, asked themselves what they must do. They knew that their wives and children were starving, and that during the bleak winter which was coming on fresh troubles were sure to arise. The whole village was being sacrificed to gratify the vengeance of one woman. Still, after all, they were men, and they hesitated to raise their hands. Instead of despatching the usual death's head and cross bones, they wrote a letter begging for mercy, and asking her, for the love of God, to remember the fate of her son, who when asked for bread, tendered a stone.

The letter was sent. The next day as Kathleen was walking through the village, she came upon a group of men who stood

surrounding Mrs Gregory. She held an open letter in her hand.

"You ask me for mercy!" she said; "and I tell you I will show you just as much as you showed when you murdered my son. You cowards, perhaps you would like to murder *me*,—if so, you can do so. I'm only a defenceless woman, but I defy you."

. . . . . .

Vengeance had come. That same night a terrible scene was enacted in a hut close to the spot where Mrs Gregory had stood.

Ever since the day when the young master lost his life James Merton had been a changed man. When Rose married, he went to live with her, and, in answer to her loving words, he promised to try and be happy. Yes, to please Rose, and in the vain hope of bringing the old smile to her lips, and the roses to her cheeks, he had made the promise; but, for all that, he knew that his days of happiness were gone. Whenever he looked at Rose, so pale and sad, his breaking heart

was almost rent in two, and his sorrow was not lessened when he saw that her husband's hair was prematurely mixed with grey. Whenever he walked abroad, his ears were filled with the wails of the suffering people, — and the sight of the woman, black and bloodstained, was for ever before his eyes.

It was a terrible time, and often, as he sat alone by the fire, he thought he would end it all, but for Rose's sake. Oh, if he could only die! yet, though he prayed and prayed, death never came.

The change in him came so gradually that Rose, who nursed and watched him carefully, hardly seemed to note it; but one day she looked in his face and seemed to know the truth.

It was one day when she was sitting at home with him alone, for he seldom went out now. Rose was sewing, when suddenly she felt impelled to look up, and she saw that her father was sitting by the fire gazing

at her. All at once the truth seemed to dawn upon her; she rose, threw her arms about her father's neck, and cried, and kissed him.

"Rose," he said, as he gently stroked her hair; "Rosie, *machree*, you mustn't grieve —'twill be better for you—and better for me, for I'm just tired out. What's that the Bible says, *mavourneen*—a life for a life?"

"Oh, father, don't talk like that!" sobbed the poor girl; "I—I can't bear it!"

She fell on her knees before him, took his hands and kissed them, but, with a shudder, he pulled them away.

"Don't, Rose," he cried, "they're covered wid blood!"

She saw that his eyes were wandering, so she put her arms about him, and said,—

"Father, you're weary; come with me and rest."

"Rest!" he repeated, gazing strangely into her face; "I can't rest—for, when I

lay me down and shut my eyes, I hear them saying I've done a murder,—and then *he* comes, the young master,—and his face is all covered wid blood . . . Last night, as I was lying in bed, your mother came to my bedside; she was all in shining white, and she looked at me and said, 'James, James, what have you done?' When I took her hand, it was all cold and dead, and she was crying, — why, Rose, you're crying too!"

"I can't help it. Oh, father!"

"Ah, you're thinkin' o' poor Michael—ah, yes, now I know—they mean to hang him; but don't grieve. Rosie, you're a good girl, and I won't bring trouble to you,—I'll see Michael righted before I die."

He rose from his seat, and, but for Rose, he would have fallen to the ground; she got him to bed, and he sank down like one weary unto death,—for a moment consciousness returned to him,—he stretched out his trembling hands, as he said,—

"Ah, Rose, 'twas well said, my heart is broken!"

. . . . . .

At six o'clock the next morning, Mrs Gregory's servants opened the Castle door, and found a man, apparently dead, lying across the threshold.

It was James Merton.

He had fainted, but was not dead, and, on restoratives being applied, he recovered consciousness sufficiently to open his eyes and ask for Mrs Gregory. The old lady was called, and when she came, Merton held forth his hands and cried,—

"Mistress, mistress, pray God to forgive me—*I killed your son!*" then, with a low moan, he sank back and died.

In his hand they found a paper bearing a full confession of the crime.

. . . . . .

Having arrived at this point Kathleen paused, as if her tale was done. I asked for the rest.

"There is very little more to tell you, Jack," she said. "Poor Merton was buried, and his confession made public. It surprised no one. Shortly afterwards, Mr O'Neil, the present landlord, came to Storport, and Mrs Gregory removed from the Castle. Though James Merton was dead and buried, she never forgave the murder of her son: it is generally believed that she incites every act of cruelty and injustice which her nephew commits; she openly defies one and all; she refuses to have any protection; and she puts herself in the power of the very people whom she has treated like dogs. Yet her very courage has commanded their respect and saved her life. Even poor Rose Merton, whom she continues to persecute cruelly, does not wish to raise a finger to harm her. Poor girl, she has certainly suffered enough. I think she was quite right when she said that Storport was not big enough to hold her as well as Mrs Gregory."

Kathleen having promised to assist Rose, lost no time in keeping her word. America was certainly the best place for her to go to; so to America she was accordingly sent. My uncle and I both added to Michael's little store of money—while all the girls turned out their wardrobes, and managed to find innumerable articles which were "just the thing" either for Rose or her little daughter. So the travellers turned their backs upon the sorrow and darkness of the old country to look for brightness, hope, and comfort in the new.

CHAPTER VIII.

"HOW chilly the weather is growing," I murmured, holding my trembling hands over the blaze which I had made in the grate, and shivering again. "I must get that rascal Shawn."

"Yer honor," said Shawn, thrusting his head in at my sitting-room door.

"Well, Shawn?"

"Would yer honor like to see a funeral? 'Tis ould Pat Murphy's, the cobbler, that was a hundred years, or thereabouts. He died a couple o' days ago, and he's had the grandest wake; for I was there myself, on account of the mashter givin' the candles!"

Here Shawn came to a full stop, gazed at me for a few seconds in silence, and then repeated his question.

"Would yer honor like to go? 'Twill be a grand funeral, I'm tould; and so it ought indeed; for 'twas time the old man went intirely to make room for them that's comin' on. 'Tis only right that yer honor should go, since the whole o' the counthry will be there; and though yer honor's often been to a wake and a wedding, sure you've never been to the graveyard or seen a funeral."

And Shawn was right; long as I had lived in Connaught—often as I had made my appearance at weddings, wakes, or fairs, I had never once had the curiosity to go over to the graveyard and witness the extraordinary process which the inhabitants of Connaught employed in committing a body to the earth.

I had seen from afar the small spot known as the graveyard — a square of

rugged earth it appeared to me, lying secluded on the hillside, with the barren peaks of the bog mountains above, and the sea washing upon the shore a hundred yards below. I had listened with interest to the wild stories and legends connected with the spot, which Shawn was ever ready to din into my ears, and for me that had been enough. Whenever I heard that a funeral service was to be performed, I religiously kept within doors; or, if I must go out, I determinedly walked in the opposite direction to that in which I knew the corpse must be conveyed. So, despite Shawn's pressing invitation to make one of the riotous company of that day, I determinedly shook my head, and commanded him to withdraw. And yet I could not help feeling some curiosity about the matter, and as the door closed upon the man's muscular figure, I strolled over to the window and took a peep at the arrange-

ments which were going forward for the day's fun. At the door of old Pat Murphy's cabin, which was set on a bog by the roadside, several hundred yards from the Lodge door, a good crowd was gathered, while along the roads, which crossed and branched off in every direction, little parties of sixes and sevens were trudging along to mingle with the great stream, and increase its dimensions, until it seemed to completely surround the house. To eyes unaccustomed to such sights it would have seemed that the whole of the inhabitants of the village were gathering together to make merry at some neighbouring fair; for the women wore their gayest petticoats and head-shawls, while some of the men disported garments of bright variegated hues. On the preceding night a keen frost had nipped the land, but as the day advanced, the air seemed to grow warmer. The sun rays, falling from a chill grey

sky, were melting the ice from both causeway and hill; yet still, upon the peaks of the distant mountains, I could see the faint glittering of frozen hail.

"A capital day for the snipe," I murmured again, as I returned to my cozy seat by the fire. "The first breath of winter seems to put new life into a man. I shall do my twenty miles to-day, and feel the better for it. On a clear, bright, frosty morning, give me the Connaught bogs."

"Ye'd travel a long way to find their match, sure enough," put in Shawn, who during my soliloquy had entered the room unperceived; "but yer honor would never go shporting to-day."

"And why not?"

"Every why, yer honor; sure ye know 'tis ould Pat Murphy's funeral, and if ye don't wish to go to it yerself, 'tis not like you to be sayin' no to *me!*"

I was astonished, and I said so, but at

Shawn's next speech my astonishment increased.

"Sure, I don't care about the funeral then, if yer honor would but let me go over to see poor ould Pat brought to life again."

"What!"

"They're lavin' the coffin-lid off in hopes that the priest, God bless him, may come in time, and if he does it will be all right, for then he can raise up Patrick, and give him the unction, that his ould body may shleep in peace."

"Shawn, are you gone mad?" I asked at last.

"Not at all, yer honor; sure everybody knows that he raised up Rose Monnaghan, on account o' her dyin' widout confession; and then he got her to confess, and she died again quiet and aisy, and had a grand wake, and was buried dacently; and when he did it to the likes o' her, why can't he do it to

ould Patrick, who died widout confessin', on account of his riverence bein' away ?"

This rigmarole amazed me. I demanded a lucid explanation from Shawn, and received only his emphatic assurance, that there was "devil a word of lie in it, at all, at all."

"Ask anybody, and ye'll find it's all true; ask his riverence," he said, when he suddenly paused, and added,—"well, indeed, maybe his riverence wouldn't own to it at all. He said himself 'twas in a faint she was, and when he put the water on her face, it brought her round to spake to them before she died."

"And between you and me, Shawn, I think his riverence was right."

"Do you, indeed, sor; well, if you'll just shtep over to the graveyard to-day, ye'll see ould Pat Murphy brought round, if his riverence has a mind to do it."

"You think I should ?"

"I'm certain sure of it."

"Very well then, I'll go. I'll just wait until the funeral procession has got well a-head, and then I will take a short cut to the graveyard by myself!"

Having gratified the wish of Shawn's heart, and determined to satisfy my own curiosity, which I must confess was by that time strongly aroused, I walked again over to the window, and took another glance at the people who were still congregating about the hut.

What a crowd it had become! the house was surrounded; the road was well covered; while still from the hillsides, over bog and moor, and along the numerous rugged roads, came straggling figures, some of them foot-sore from long travelling, others huddling their rags about their attenuated frames, and shrinking from the chilly touch of the air; but finally all of them became merged into the great crowd, as runlets mingle in the sea. One or two hours passed and I became restless; the gradual increasing

of the crowd, the protracted delay, stimulated my morbid curiosity, and I began to long for the time to come when this strange event was to take place at the grave. Not that I altogether believed what Shawn had told me, I had heard too many of his legends for that; nor did I for a moment imagine that anything extraordinary would happen to prevent the interment of the corpse; but I did anticipate a peculiar sight, and as I had determined to witness it, the delay in doing so annoyed me. But the inhabitants of Storport were not accustomed to quick movements. Slowly the great crowd increased until the road was completely blocked, and the mingled voices of the people reached my ears as I stood at the open window of my room, It certainly was going to be "a grand funeral." Men and women, boys and girls, of all ages, sizes, and degrees, and from all parts of the country around, were by that time gathered together. Some of them carried jars under

their arms; others drinking-vessels; while, to my amazement, others had got creels of turf upon their backs, as if that too was meant as a contribution to the ceremony of the day. At length the crowd made a swaying movement, and then began to move in one long, straggling mass up from the cabin. I looked searchingly along the lines of grotesque figures, and at length perceived the coffin, a box of white deal, standing in the middle of a sheet, the ends of which were carelessly held by two men. The crowd moved so quickly, and the road was so rugged to tread, that the coffin was jolted and swung in such a violent manner as to cause the loose lid to fall once or twice almost to the ground; but the carpenter who made the coffin, and now walked beside it, carrying in his hand the hammer and nails which would be necessary for the completion of his work, lifted from the road a heavy stone and placed it on the coffin-lid to keep it in its place. Again I turned

from the window, and crossing over to the hearth stood with my back to the fire. That it would be useless for me to attempt to leave the house for several hours I knew, since the funeral party had to cross the estuary and there was only one boat to take the whole lot. It would occupy fully two hours, I reflected, plying backwards and forwards, to convey across the living and the dead. So having given Shawn leave to depart at once, and having had something to eat, I took up a book to pass the time away. How long I read I don't know, I only remember coming to myself with a start and leaping confusedly to my feet, to find the fire low in the grate, the day waning, and the air bitterly cold. I opened the window and looked out; there was no living soul abroad. The waning light of the sky fell upon the village, lying chill and silent, with the black bogs stretching ominously around, but in the air there was the faint echo of a wild moaning and shrieking which was

wafted to me by the breath of the sea, and which I knew must come from the graveyard.

I hurrriedly buttoned on my coat, and left the house.

The evening air was bitter; thick sheets of ice covered the causeway, and even the brown bogs were hard and easy to tread. I made my way quickly; in half an hour I had crossed the ferry, plodded over the sands, and stood upon the brow of a hill looking down upon the graveyard. But could it be a graveyard? It was more like a scene from the *Inferno*. Half-a-dozen fires blazed up, illuminating hundreds of recumbent figures. Stone jars were tossed about; drinking vessels scattered here and there; empty creels overturned beside small mounds of turf. Some three or four men, with bare heads and arms, worked diligently at a hole with pick and spade; others sat smoking beside the fires; others had picked out from the confused mass of stones some well-known grave, and stood by it, drinking

and shouting between whiles; while in the midst of all this stood the coffin, lidless, with the ashen face of the corpse turned blankly to the sky. With a shrug of the shoulders, I descended the hill and entered the graveyard, the better to view what was being done. No sooner, however, had my feet touched the sacred ground than a sickening odour, which seemed to permeate the whole air, met my nostrils, and made me pause. Faugh! it was like a charnel-house. I turned my face to the sea, which washed upon the sands, a few hundred yards below me, and its fresh, invigorating breath swept away the pestilence which seemed to rise like vapour from the earth. I stepped forward, and, glancing keenly around, took in the whole situation. A nearer view showed me what I had not seen before. Several figures lying prone amidst the scattered *debris* of rocks and stones, snoring in a heavy, drunken sleep; others, perched upon the graves, sat drinking and disputing,

and in their wild excitement almost coming to blows. Close to the grave which was being newly made, a woman sat crying over the skull of an infant, which she had buried years before, and which had been thrown out of the earth by the pickaxe, now busily at work again ; while the shrieks and moans which were given forth on every side drowned the sound even of the washing of the sea. While noting all this I had been diligently making my way towards the spot where the coffin stood, when suddenly my foot caught against some invisible object, and I fell. Again came that sickening odour which had at first offended my nostrils, but this time it was so strong and so offensive that it almost made me faint. I scrambled to my feet, joined the group around the nearest fire, and having partaken of the whisky which was so liberally handed round, I returned to the spot where I had fallen, determined to examine the ground and discover, if possible, the cause of the sickening smell. I had

fallen across a square pile of stones, which was raised some two or three inches above the ground. By the waning light of the sky I could see no more, but having possessed myself of a torch, and looked again, I opened my eyes in amazement, for the stones covered a coffin, the other half of which was thrust into the ground. The coffin was rotting, the seams yawning, and down its sides was running a greenish matter, the odour from which had met my nostrils, and was now poisoning the whole air. With a shudder I turned away, and, taking my torch in my hand, examined several other graves, some of which I found in the same condition; others, if possible, a little worse. I had examined the fourth grave when I was suddenly joined by Shawn, who had been carousing at the other end of the grave-yard, and who now came up to express his joy at seeing me there.

"Shawn," I said, pointing to the graves,

"what on earth induces your people to bury the dead like that?"

"Like what, yer honor?

"Why, with one-half of the coffin in the ground, the other half left uncovered to create a pestilence in the place?"

"Is it the shtones yer honor manes? Well, well, that's a funny way to spake o' them. Sure, there isn't enough room for the whole o' them; the graves is choked full already, and some o' them, like Pat Murphy, must make do wid a little bit o' room."

"But think of the consequences of that; the odour which comes from the graves is enough to breed a fever."

"The smell is it? Sure, that comes from the grass, yer honor; 'tis a queer grass that grows here, and they're sayin' it has a queer charm about it. Och, murder!" he suddenly screamed, "boys, boys, here comes the soggarth!"

The effect was miraculous; in a moment

the whole party rose shrieking and moaning, to their feet, and congregated in a wild crowd around the coffin, which still stood open upon the ground. Some bore in their hands flaming torches, which lit up the faces of the crowd, and the now fast darkening sky. By their light I could see the priest walking with long strides towards the newly-made grave. As he came nearer, the whole crowd uttered a wild shriek, and fell upon their knees.

"Yer riv'rence, raise up ould Patrick; he died widout confessin', on account o' yer riv'rence bein' away, and his soul, God bless it, will nivir risht in peace."

Without a word, the priest walked quietly up to the coffin and blessed the dead body; then he moved to the open grave and blessed the soil; then he spoke quietly to the people.

"'Tis not in the power of mortal man to raise up the dead," he said; "that

belongs only to Almighty God. Cormic, screw the lid on to the coffin, make haste to bury the dead, and do not disgrace the sacredness of the occasion by drunkenness and riot. Good-night, my dear people, may God bless your work!"

Having spoken thus, he mingled with the crowd, and quickly disappeared.

For a time the whole crowd stood petrified; then the carpenter stepped slowly forward, and began to screw the lid on to the coffin, and the whole of the company began moaning and yelling, while the body was finally consigned to the earth. I took a seat upon the hillside, and waited till the work was over and most of the mourners had gone away, then I too arose, and took my departure. It was growing towards ten o'clock—the sky was studded with stars, and the moon, full and bright, poured her rays upon the earth — she lit up the graveyard, the withered grass

and stones, the grey embers of the dead fires, the broken jars and the drinking vessels, the black figures, coiled snake-like upon the ground in a heavy, drunken slumber, while from the recesses of the black hills around came the faint echo of riotous voices, which proceeded from the drunken revellers who were making their way home. I turned to my companion, who stood beside me, silent and shamefaced.

"Well, Shawn, was I not right? Had the priest the power to raise up old Murphy?"

"Troth, he had thin, if he had the wish to do it," said Shawn doggedly; and I saw that if I argued till the sun rose, I should not convince him of his folly in so believing; so I nodded "good-night," and walked in silence towards the Lodge.

CHAPTER IX.

WHEN I passed through the village that night, I suspected there must be something wrong. I saw dark shapes flitting hither and thither like spirit forms, while my ears seemed to detect strange sounds of wailing sorrow. I stood and listened and looked about me; but seeing no one whom I could question, I decided that the mystery must be connected with the proceedings of the day, and feeling tolerably well satisfied with the explanation, I walked on towards home.

Here a new surprise awaited me. On

opening the door, and stepping into the hall, I was met by Oona, pale as a ghost, and trembling violently.

"Oh, Jack!" she cried, "do you think it is true?"

She took my arm, and drew me into the dining-room; where I found Biddy and Amy, looking pale and frightened too. Then I saw that Oona had been crying.

"Oh, Jack," she sobbed, as I put my arm about her, and laid her head upon my shoulder, "have you heard? do you know—but it's too dreadful—it *can't* be true!"

Thoroughly mystified by this time, I did my best to compose the girls; then, in answer to my inquiry, Oona told me that Conolly had been killed.

"Killed!" I exclaimed.

"I think so, Jack," said Oona; "they say he was shot on the Gulranny road this evening. Papa, Aileen, and Nora have ridden

off to the spot where they say he fell, and Kate started ten minutes ago to see if she could learn anything about it at the barrack."

The news coming thus suddenly upon me gave me a shock; but a moment's reflection served partly to dispel my fear. I remembered Conolly's former escapades, and smiled.

"Don't excite yourselves," I said, as the frightened girls clustered about me; "depend upon it that whoever is killed Mr Conolly is safe."

But speak as I would, laugh as I might, I was utterly unable to dispel the awful depression which had fallen upon the Lodge. We clustered close together, and sat down by the fire to await the return of my uncle and the girls; and, in answer to my questions, Oona told me the little that she knew.

"We were just going to have our tea," she said, "and were all together in the dining-room, when Shawn rushed in, as

white as death, and told us that Mr O'Neil was shot. Well, we were all fearfully excited, and papa and Kate were starting for the Castle, when what should we see but Mr O'Neil's car, with Mr O'Niel on it, dash furiously past. For a while after that we could learn nothing—the whole village seemed to be in commotion—people were gliding about like ghosts. Papa was on the point of starting for the barrack, when "Michael, the ferry," came up and told us that as Mr O'Neil had been driving along the Gulranny road he had been shot at by some one hidden in a ditch—that he had fired back at a man whom he saw running away, and that the man fell dead!"

"The man was Conolly?"

"Yes, Jack, Conolly!"

Still, I could not believe it; so I suggested that before accepting the gloomiest side of the picture, we should wait for Kathleen's news.

So we clustered together round the din-

ing-room hearth; and, for the first time since my arrival in Storport, I felt that I was really among the landlord shooters. We sat like ghosts in the firelight—saying little, listening for Kate's footfall, but hearing only the loud ticking of the clock. Half-an-hour—an hour passed, and Kathleen did not return. We all grew restless, and Oona suggested that I should walk down to the barrack and meet Kate. At first I refused, being loath to leave the three girls alone,—but presently my curiosity overcame me; I yielded, and after a secret but anxious embrace from Oona in the hall, I set out.

It was a dark, cold, gloomy night; scarcely any soul seemed to be abroad; but again I fancied I heard about me a mixture of mysterious sounds. Having reached the high road, I was conscious of figures moving about me like ghosts in the darkness, but instead of pausing to inquire the news, I made straight for the barrack. Here I

found a little more life—the barrack was lit up—two policemen, well armed, were on guard—while around the building lingered several figures, quite indistinguishable in the darkness. On mentioning my name, and asking for Kathleen, I was at once admitted, and came face to face with my cousin, who was talking to some policemen in the hall. Kathleen looked very pale, her eyes were wet, and when I took her hand, I felt that it was cold as ice.

"Is it true, Kate?" I asked, for want of something else to say.

"Quite true," returned Kate tremulously; "poor Conolly!" and she hid her face for a moment, and sobbed.

"Where is he?"

"He is here—he was carried straight here, and will remain till after the inquest to-morrow."

"I should like to see him."

"Very well," said Kate, "you can see

him if you like, Jack; but I think I'll wait for you here. I have had one glimpse of him, and it has unnerved me terribly. I couldn't stand it again."

Kathleen was certainly terribly unnerved; seeing this, I offered to take her home at once, but as I had expressed a wish to see Conolly, she insisted on my doing so. One of the policemen offered to escort me, so, with a strange sense of sickness upon me, I walked away.

We passed along a bare, dimly-lighted passage, and entered a room. The room was in darkness, but upon my guide advancing a few steps, and holding up the candle which he carried, I saw before me the prostrate figure of a man. He lay upon a wooden stretcher in the middle of the room. The sight was so ghastly that for a moment my courage seemed to be failing me. At one glance I had recognised Conolly, changed as he was. He was completely dressed, but his ragged clothes

were soaked with bogmire and bespattered with blood—his face had been wiped, but some of the black which he had used as a mask still clung to his cheeks and mouth; his pale blue eyes were open, and his teeth were set as if with intense pain. I gazed for a moment, then with a sigh I turned away.

On my return to the hall, Kathleen and I set out at once—both I fancy, feeling rather glad to be away from the place where poor murdered Conolly lay.

"I suppose, Kate," I said, as soon as we found ourselves alone, "Mr O'Neil has committed this murder?"

"No," returned Kate; "not Mr O'Neil, but a young Englishman, a friend of his, who was visiting the Castle, and who happened to be on the car."

"Then it was Mr O'Neil who was fired at?"

"Yes. He received the usual notice it seems, several weeks ago, and conse-

quently avoided the Gulranny road until to-day, when he believed the storm had passed. The young stranger had been seal shooting in Gulranny bay, and knowing the state of the country, he kept his rifle loaded on the way home. When the shots were fired, the horse bolted, and, if Mr Gregory had been alone as usual, nothing more would have been known of the affair; but his friend, who is a mere boy, got excited, jumped off the car, ran back to the spot, and shot Conolly through the heart as he was trying to make his escape."

"Was he alone?"

"No; there were two with him, I believe—the police fired on them, but they escaped."

By this time we reached the Lodge, and found the dining-room occupied by an excited group. My uncle, Nora, and Aileen, who had returned, looking weary and pained, still wore their riding

dresses; so did Achill Murry, and young Bingley; while Father John, and Dr Maguire, were bespattered with mud with hard walking. Most of them were drinking the grog, of which they seemed sorely in need —while they were discussing, in eager whispers, the horrible events of the day.

"Kate," said my uncle, when we appeared, "can you put us all up for the night? We're summoned, all but his reverence, on the coroner's jury to-morrow, and 'tis late for his reverence and the doctor to be walking home.

I saw a terribly anxious look come into Kate's eyes as she said, putting her hand on his shoulder,—

"Then *you* are summoned too, papa?"

"Sure enough, *mavourneen;* they've taken the young Englishman prisoner, and we're to say to-morrow whether he's to be tried for manslaughter or set free."

"And which of the two do ye mane to do, Mr Kenmare?" asked the doctor.

"What *can* we do, doctor? After all, the young fellow can't be blamed, for he did it in self-defence. Poor, poor Conolly! he was always weak and easily led, and don't I know he's not to blame either. The villain that set the whole thing going, and deserves the punishment, is talking it over at this moment by his own fireside."

For a moment there was silence. I saw Kathleen quietly close and fasten the shutters, a thing I had never known her do before. Then she left the room to see about accommodating her visitors for the night. The silence was at length broken by Father John.

"And so you really think, Mr Kenmare," said he, "that Mr Conolly never fired that shot?"

My uncle sighed.

"Not at all, Father John," said he. "I'm certain sure the poor fellow *did* fire it, and if he hadn't been shot dead, I believe

he'd have fired another. The second barrel of the gun he used is loaded almost to the muzzle, and even now the forefinger of his right hand is bent, which shows that he died as he was about to pull the trigger."

While the conversation was general, I, who really knew little or nothing of the subject, held my peace; but after most of the company had retired for the night, and only four of us, my uncle, Kathleen, Oona and myself were left alone, I asked an explanation of my uncle's words.

"Who do you think," I said, "is at the bottom of this affair?"

Before replying, my uncle looked cautiously round the room, opened the door suddenly, shut it again, then returned to his seat.

"Jack, my boy," he said, speaking very low, "there isn't a man in Storport but knows who's at the bottom of it, including Father John himself. Listen; there's

one, a Mr Timlin—brother-in-law to Mrs Timlin, and therefore a kind of relation to Conolly, who lives in Gulranny. He is a well-to-do farmer. For years he has rented a rabbit warren, which lies close to his farm. A few weeks ago O'Neil took the warren from him, and shortly afterwards received sentence of death. It was this man's gun which was found by Conolly's side, and it was this very man who, a few minutes after the skirmish to-day, galloped into Gulranny and said that O'Neil was killed! He's a dirty, low blackguard, that fears the gallows! He wanted O'Neil put out of the way, and he couldn't find a better man than Conolly to do it; so he supplied him with a gun, and plenty of whisky, and galloped home with the news, in order to clear himself."

"You think that?"

"I'm certain of it!"

"And you could swear to the gun?"

"Among a hundred!"

"Then if that's the case, it's a pity the man can't be punished."

"Do you think so?"

"Don't you?"

My uncle shook his head.

"We couldn't bring poor Conolly back any way," he said, "so 'tis better to let it rest."

All that night I scarcely slept; at seven o'clock in the morning I was out of the house, walking with Oona, whom I found restlessly pacing the gravel before the hall-door. I took her hand upon my arm, and we walked through the village together. Although it was so early, everybody seemed to be astir, and everywhere along the road small groups of men and women gathered talking eagerly, while the barrack was besieged by a regular crowd; the cold feeling of death seemed to have got in the air, and everybody was changed; the people scarcely looked at us at all; when they did, it

was with a sullen, sinister look of mingled fear and dislike. I fancy Oona noticed this, and understood it far better than I, for she clung in a half-frightened way to my arm as if to protect me.

We had finished our walk and were on our way back to the Lodge, when in passing the barrack gate we suddenly came face to face with Mrs Timlin. She looked angry and excited; she stopped directly before Oona, and exclaimed,—

"The dirty black-hearted rogues. Do ye know what they've done, Miss Oona? Afther murthering poor Conolly, they've taken Toney Timlin and locked him up in the barrack!"

"What for?" asked Oona; "what do they say he has done, Mrs Timlin?"

After a defiant stare at me, Mrs Timlin replied,—

"They *say* he was in wid Conolly in his plans to shoot the mashter—bad cess to him! but sure they'll have to *prove*

it; and there isn't a soul in Storport would swear away the life of an innocent boy."

Oona uttered a few sympathetic words, and we passed on.

At breakfast that morning all the conversation turned upon the one absorbing theme. I told of the interview we had had with Mrs Timlin, and of the news she gave; and I fancied my uncle looked troubled. Again I felt mystified; I had imagined that the police had acted wisely in taking the real offender into custody:—one glance around the table showed me that in this opinion I stood completely alone.

The inquest was to be held early;—as soon, therefore, as breakfast was over, those who had been summoned started off. I remained behind for a while to brighten up the spirits of the girls, but I found it a hopeless business. All their old liveliness had departed,—and the very

Lodge itself seemed to have been transformed into the dreariness of a tomb. Finding myself of so little use to the girls, I at length turned my thoughts to myself, remembered the letters which I had received by post that morning, and instinctively looked around for Oona. She was nowhere to be seen. I went up to her room, quietly opened the door, and there I found her sitting by her writing-desk with her face buried in her hands. I fancy she heard me enter, but she did not move. I went over, put my arms around her, and laid her pretty head on my shoulder.

"Oona, my pet, why are you crying?"

"I—I didn't mean to cry," sobbed Oona, as she hid her face on my shoulder, "but I went down to see him, and it nearly broke my heart . . . Oh, Jack, it is terrible!"

I held her closely to me, and let her cry a little; while my body trembled

through and through as her soft hands clung to mine ; then I said tenderly,—

"Oona, I want to talk to you about myself to-day."

"Yes, Jack."

"I got letters this morning which demand my return to town."

I felt Oona start, and I fancied she crept a little bit closer to me ; but she said nothing.

"I have had a very pleasant holiday," I continued, "thanks to my Connaught Cousins. I ought to be satisfied, but I find I'm not ; when I read those letters this morning, I felt as if they had brought me sentence of death ! Oona, my darling, I love you !"

This time Oona raised her head.

"Then you will come back ?" she said. "Oh, Jack, if you love me you will not leave me long."

"That shall be as you wish, my pet. But think well, Oona. Could you bear

to leave Storport, your friends, your horses, your hammock, your dreams, for *me?*"

"No," said Oona, smiling a little through her tears, "I shall not leave them, Jack. We will always come back to dear old Ireland once a year, and I will bring my dreams to London with me to brighten up your rooms if I can. Dear Jack, I will try to be very good to you; only I feel it is sinful to feel so happy when I think of poor Conolly."

. . . . . .

When the luncheon bell sounded, Oona and I were still sitting by the window dreaming. We descended the stairs together, and found a large company awaiting us in the dining-room. There was my uncle, and Father John, Dr Maguire, Murry, and young Bingley, besides the clergyman, and one or two other gentlemen, who were strangers to me. I asked what they had done.

"It's all over, Jack," returned my uncle. "Of course we've acquitted the young Englishman, but I believe Mr Toney Timlin is to be tried at Gulranny court."

CHAPTER X.

HOW the next few days passed I scarcely know. For two evenings I accompanied some of the girls to Mrs Timlin's kitchen, and we mingled amongst the crowd which had collected together to do the last honours to Conolly. On the morning of the third day it seemed to me that the whole of the village had turned out to see the poor fellow laid in his grave. It had been a grand wake, and it was a grand funeral, but I for one was glad when it was over, thinking that at length popular excitement would die away. But I was wrong. When we got home from the funeral, my

uncle's expressive face showed me that something was wrong. I soon found what it was. Some words of his had got abroad, and he had been summoned as a witness against Toney Timlin at Gulranny court.

"I've to go in to-morrow, Jack," said my uncle, "so if you want to see the clearing up of this affair, you had better come . . . Shawn, you rascal," he added, "have Lucy and Jack saddled by nine in the morning, and see they're in condition for a gallop."

Punctually at nine in the morning the horses were at the Lodge door, and I, after having taken an affectionate farewell of Oona, mounted Jack, and, accompanied by my uncle, galloped off along the Gulranny road. I was in excellent spirits, and anxious to reach the scene of action, for in truth I was eager to avenge poor Conolly's death.

"At last," I said to myself, "the real offender will be punished, and poor Conolly's death avenged."

On our arrival, we found the court

crammed to suffocation, and Toney Timlin, the lowest looking blackguard I had ever set eyes on—had already taken his place in the dock. My uncle, being a witness, was sent to the waiting-room, but I was permitted to take my seat in the body of the court. I watched the proceedings with interest; I saw the witnesses enter the box, and perjure themselves deliberately: then came my uncle's turn, and I sighed relieved, thinking, "at last the truth will be spoken, and a death-blow will be given to all that has gone before."

My uncle seemed scarcely himself—a fact which somewhat amazed me, since I knew that his evidence, though of great importance, was of the most straightforward kind. He was certainly not easy in his mind; he answered the first few questions honestly enough; then the gun, the very one which poor Conolly had used, was put into his hand.

"Have you ever seen that gun before?"

My uncle nodded.

"I have."

"When?"

"Three days ago, at Storport barrack."

"Was that the first time you saw it?"

"I don't know."

"You know the prisoner?"

"I do."

"Have you ever seen him with a gun?"

"I have."

"With this gun?"

Again my uncle shook his head.

"I don't know."

"Do you mean to assert, on your oath, Mr Kenmare, that this gun is not the property of the prisoner at the bar?"

"No; neither do I assert that it is—guns are so much alike, I wouldn't swear either one way or the other."

So the evidence closed, and that very day I saw the prisoner walk out of court a free man.

"Come Jack, my boy," said my uncle, taking my arm and leading me through

the crowd to the place where our horses awaited us. "We promised the girls to get back early; so prepare yourself for a good gallop home."

I mounted my horse in silence; in silence too we galloped fully two miles along the road; then we pulled up our horses a bit, and I asked my uncle why he refused to swear to the gun.

"You could have got that black-looking villain out of the way for some time to come."

"Sure, don't I know it, Jack, and there isn't a boy in Storport deserves it more."

"Then why, in heaven's name, didn't you do it?"

He gave that cautious look about him, and sunk his voice to a whisper before he replied.

"The word they wanted me to speak would have been my own death-warrant!"

"Good God!" I exclaimed; "they would

never dare harm *you!*—you must be mistaken; I can't believe it!"

He quietly put his hand in his pocket and drew forth a piece of paper.

"That doesn't look very important, does it, Jack?" said he; "but when I received it last night I knew that if I spoke the word that sent Mr Timlin to gaol to-day, you would most likely return to the Lodge to-night carrying my dead body along with you. Well, I daresay you think I'm a bit of a coward, Jack; perhaps I am, for the receipt of that paper unhinged me. If I had only had myself to think of, I should have spoken out bold, and defied them all, but I remembered my girls at home. I pictured to myself what they would feel, sitting together round the dead body of their old father, and, for the life of me, I couldn't speak!"

At this I could say nothing—I was thinking of Oona.

. . . . . .

Eight o'clock: dinner was over, and we were all collected in the cozy drawing-room of the Lodge. The girls seemed a little dull, and even my uncle's jolly face was somewhat overcast. It was the last evening of my stay in Storport. Yes, my visit had in truth come to an end; my packages were all done up—most of my farewells had been said; and at nine o'clock in the morning, I should mount the car which was destined to bear me away.

It was a cold winter night; outside the snow was falling heavily, but all was cozy comfort within. The girls had donned their brightest costumes, though they could not don their brightest faces, and one and all seemed to take intense delight in calling me "brother" Jack! In sooth, they hung about me, and so liberally supplied me with kisses that I was obliged, in sheer self-defence, to seek protection from Oona. . . . She was sitting in a corner of the room, busily

at work tying up a package which was evidently intended for me. When I went to her, she looked up, half-shyly, half-pleased, and said,—

"There, Jack, they are quite ready."

"What are they, dear?"

Oona frowned.

"Forgetful boy!—as if you didn't know. They are my manuscripts — you are to get me a publisher for them—"

"Of course—I haven't forgotten—but, Oona, I don't mean to have them published until—"

"Until—"

"Well, until you can put some other name upon the fly-leaf than *Oona Kenmare!*"

. . . . . .

Not soon shall I forget the parting at the door next morning; with my uncle's kindly face beaming upon me, and the girls clinging around me. At last, with a hug all round, and one special embrace to Oona, I was off. The

car dashed down the avenue, and out on to the lonely road. Looking backward I saw the village, where I had known so much kindness, and seen so much sorrow. On the roadside, Shawn, his father, and all his sisters and brothers, were waiting with many more to bid me "good-bye." Poor Irish souls! As I looked into their wild faces, and pressed their hands, I thought of their many virtues, their simple affections, their deep and cruel wrongs (for wronged the Irish have been, God knows!), and I said to myself, with one whose soul was large with human kindness, though he fell upon a stormy time, "God bless Ireland!"

As the car paused on the summit of the hill, I saw my uncle and the girls at the Lodge gate, watching me go—and, standing up with a full heart, I waved "good-bye" to my "Connaught Cousins."

THE END.

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